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SEPTEMBER 26, 1980

contents

BUCKLER SCRUTON	Dante: The Divine Comedy—Translated by C. H. Sisson	106
	Dante: The Divine Comedy—Translated by Kenneth Mackenzie	
	George Holmes: Dante	
MICHAEL CARVER	Ronald Lewin: The Chief—Field Marshal Lord Wavell	108
PHILIP MASON	Dom Moraes: Mrs Gandhi	
HUGH TINKER	Nicholas Mansergh and Penderel Moon (Editors): The Transfer of Power 1942-47: Constitutional Relations Between Britain and India Volume 9: The Fixing of a Time Limit 4 November 1946—22 March 1949	109
	Author: Author	
DAVID LODGE	Fiction	110
G. P. BUTLER	Mordgeal Richter: Joshua Then and Now	
ERIC KORN	Günther Grass: Kopfgeburt	
	Kurt Vonnegut and Ivan Chermayeff: Sun Moon Star	
A. S. BYATT	Penelope Fitzgerald: Human Voices	111
PAUL BAILEY	Frederick Busch: Round	
PATRICIA CRAIG	Dapsi Sidhu: The Crow Eaters	
GRAHAM HUGHES	Vi-Fu Tu: Landscapes of Fear	112
ANNE STEVENSON	Swifts (poem)	
	Information please	
THEODORE WITTS	D. J. Enright: The Oxford Book of Contemporary Verse 1945-80	113
WENDY COPE	Vasko Popa: The Golden Apple	
JAY PARINI	Richard Eberhart: Ways of Light	
JAMES LASHIN	Jeremy Reed: Bleecker Street	
	Walk on Through	
ROBERT BROWNING	Cyril Mango: Byzantium	114
J. H. D'ARMS	Richard Krautholmer: Rome—Profile of a City, 312-1308	
	Commentary	
FRANCIS WINDHAM	Garbo (National Film Theatre)	
RICHARD COMBS	My American Uncle (Academy 2 Cinema)	
PATRICK O'DONNELL	Elizabeth Schwarzkopf (Wigmore Hall)	
FRANCIS SPALDING	Stanley Spencer (Royal Academy)	
LYNNE THURS	Watch on the Rhine (Lyttelton)	
ALAN JENNINGS	Company (Cottesloe)	
JACQUELINE PEARSON	The Duchess of Malfi (Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester)	
CHRISTOPHER EDWARDS	Submielners (Theatre Upstairs, Royal Court)	
ERIC KORN	Reminders	
	To the Editor	
	Among this week's contributors	
	Fifty years on...	
GILLIAN WAGNER	Joy Parr: Labouring Children—British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada 1869-1924	115
JASPER RIDLEY	Phyllis Harrison (Editor): The Home Children	
BARNETT COCKS	Georgiana Blackiston: Woburn and the Russells	
	D. L. Rydz: The Parliamentary Agents	
CHARLES TOMLINSON	The Poet as Translator	116
P. N. FURRANK	William H. Pritchard: Lives of the Modern Poets	
J. R. NADDICOTT	J. L. Bolton: The Medieval English Economy 1150-1500	117
D. F. A. MATTHEW	Barbara English: The Lords of Holderness 1086-1260	
JUDITH MCCLURE	Christopher Donaldson: Martin of Tours	
VALENTINE CUNNINGHAM	V. S. Pritchett: The Tale Bearers—Essays on English, American and Other Writers	118
JOHN BATCHELOR	Daniel R. Schwarz: Conrad—Aimay's Polly to Under Western Eyes	
CRAIG BROWN	Nicholas Wollaston: The Man on the Ice Cap—The Life of August Courtland	119
ALFRED STEPHENSON	J. R. L. Anderson: High Mountains and Cold Seas—a Biography of H. W. Tilman	
LEON O. BROIN	R. V. Comerford: Charles J. Kickham	
DAVID HUNT	Peter Levi: The Hill of Kronos	
PETER CLARKE	Arthur Marwick: Class—Image and Reality in Britain, France and the USA since 1930	120
PHILIP PETTIT	David Thomas: Naturalism and Social Science	
DONALD MACGILL	R. K. Merton, James S. Coleman, Peter H. Rossi (Editors): Qualitative and Quantitative Social Research—Papers in Honour of Paul F. Lazarsfeld	121
C. B. SCUMMIT	Richard H. Popkin: The History of Skepticism from Pyrrhon to Spinoza	
JEAN WILSON	Lucy de Bracy: Women and the Devil in Sixteenth-century Literature	

LITERATURE

Dante at a distance

By Roger Scruton

DANTE:
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It would be no exaggeration to say that *Four Quartets* owes as much to Dante as to any single writer in Eliot's native tongue. Nor is this an eccentricity; on the contrary, the Dantean quality of *Four Quartets* is integral to its achievement. Modern poetry grew from the attempt to abandon poetic diction and write of the "unhappy consciousness" in the language which belongs to it. It reached fruition when that language, uneasy, embarrassed though it was, began to bear the weight of ideas which transcended and measured its uncertainties. It is a stylistic achievement, while dignified enough to convey such a moral idea. That achievement was Dante's. It was also Eliot's.

When Eliot had acquired his style, he felt obliged to repudiate Milton (perhaps the only great poet to have been a crypto-Catholic). The reasons that he offered (and which were endorsed by Leavis, and so by a whole generation of critics and writers) were odd, and in some ways inescapable. But the motive for the gesture is clear. It was necessary to dissociate Dante and Milton, first as versifiers, secondly as thinkers. The superficial resemblance between them, so often invoked by their nineteenth-century admirers, points in the direction of political and theological commitment. But the Miltonic style is elevated and sublime, unsuited to the poetry of unbelief. By contrast, Dante combines plain speaking and noble sentiment; he never believes either the unhappiness which defines him, or the vision which draws him on. This suggests a model of poetic style suited to the expression of metaphysical desolation. The orderliness of Dante's verse seems to represent an achievement that is stylistic and spiritual at once. It is as though the poet rose to felicity through the purification of sinful speech. So he served as a model for the attempt—unsuccessfully undertaken by Eliot, Stevens and Pound—to bring order to the experience of unbelief by bringing order to its language.

The stylistic distinction between Milton and Dante needs no comment. But there is a distinction of vision that in part serves to explain it. The power of Milton is a power more muscular than intellectual; his language, abstracted from the spoken tongue, seems, like the Word of God, to create rather than to regard its subject-matter. It sends out a vision into infinite space, which proceeds unimpeded by the preoccupations of mortality. Milton's paradise is human, but without the contingencies of human life: its paths and beauty stand outside the realm of local emotions. Dante's verse, by contrast, ranges freely through all human experience, and is never so far advanced in abstraction as to lose contact with a particular place and a particular time.

This does not mean that Dante is less universal than Milton. On the contrary, his universality is of a higher order, precisely because the vision stems from and makes room for what is most ephemeral. Dante was unconcerned to be of any time except his own, and he wished to understand his time completely, describing a highly specific historical condition in terms of the eternal truths to which he was a witness. He therefore tried to preserve the particularity of his subject-matter, in a language which still moved with the logic of abstract thought. It is from this "peculiarity" of vision that there arose the peculiarity of style. Just as he saw the full of man in terms of the spiritual desolation of his native city, so he did the abstractness of Thomist philosophy into a commentary upon his own personal pilgrimage. This reconciling of fragmented experience with a redeeming ideal was an inspiration to Eliot. In his early essay, Eliot had proved Dante's ability to turn philosophy into vision. But this praise concealed his own longing, partly fulfilled in *Four Quartets*, to turn vision into philosophical truth.

It is not, then, surprising to find that Dante has become, as it were, a canonical part of English literature. C. H. Sisson's translation into colloquial free verse is testimony to this canonization, and it provides the opportunity to reflect on the contemporary significance of the *Divine Comedy*. (Some idea of Sisson's interest in the aspects of Dante to which I have referred can be gathered from the fact that this phrase is deliberately mis-translated. It becomes, by way of signalling Dante's modernity, "the style" style. The transposition of beauty to a merle in the eyes of unbelief.)

Sisson's translation coincides with that of Kenneth Mackenzie, published by the Folio Society. The second, with its monotonous pentameters, belongs to the nineteenth century, while the first makes a bold and unmanly way of unpedestrian attempt to unite Dante with his legitimate heirs. It has to be remembered, in considering these translations, that Anglo-Saxon interest in Dante had long preceded the Eliotian revolution in taste. The *Divine Comedy* was translated innumerable times during the last century, and into every available poetic idiom, from Cary's blank verse with the diction of Scott to the business-like fluency of Longfellow. These translations accompanied the flowering of Dante scholarship in England, which involved one of our great prime ministers (Gladstone), led to the foundation of the Oxford Dante Society, inspired Edward Moore's meticulous *Studies in Dante*, and culminated in the Temple Classics edition of the *Comedy*, which has made succeeding generations familiar with the text and its interpretation. This edition, acting jointly with Dorothy Sayers's inimitable Penguin, has ensured that English readers make serious efforts to read the original. Its succinct and scholarly notes are due largely to the unassuming Rev P. H. Wicksteed, who introduced us to the English reading public and refuted, in a review of *Dee Capital*, the labour theory of value.

It stands as a testimony to the culture and open-mindedness of the Edwardian educated class, and shows an understanding of Dante's theology and politics which are hard to improve upon without writing at considerable length. Yet, as far as the text is concerned, the Italian text is slightly (but at times significantly) corrupt, and the scholarship is too succinct for the ill-educated modern reader to bear. This would surely be everyone's preferred edition of the *Comedy*.

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prefers to begin from the ideas of courtly love which find embodiment in the figure of Beatrice, and in more on from there to the neo-Platonic cosmology which Dante studied during his years of exile. In other words, he emphasizes the aspect of Dante which most unites him with the poetic orthodoxy of the pre-Renaissance, and as a result, gives us very vivid impression of his stylistic and visionary achievement. He introduces us elaborately to the problem of Beatrice's reality, acknowledging the while that it hardly matters to an understanding of the poetry whether or not the supreme fiction was also real. He mentions the influence of Cavalcanti, offering the following summary of the *Donna mi prega*: "Love is just a powerful emotion for which there is a physical explanation. It does not put you in touch with truth or goodness, quite the reverse indeed. ('I do not hope', wrote Cavalcanti, 'that a man of base heart will understand my meaning'; nevertheless one can venture to say that his meaning was not that.)"

Holmes argues that the amalgamation of religious and erotic devotion (and their combined representation in the figure of Beatrice) constitutes Dante's originality among medieval poets. But this seems implausible. Surely the assimilation of the two kinds of love is essential to the neo-Platonic doctrines of the soul, and is present, in some form or other, in almost all the literature of courtly love? It seems to be there in the *Fraserburg*, in Grandson and Charles d'Orléans, and in Chaucer. Replacing erotic by filial love, the Middle English *Pearl* is a variant which expresses just the same synthesis of earthly and transcendental longing for which Holmes praises Dante.

Still, Holmes is undeniably right to emphasize the centrality of love in Dante's philosophy, and it is important to understand the doctrine of love if we are to assess the merits of any particular translation. It is love which moves the sun and the other stars; it is love which draws the soul towards God, by a *luce intellettuale, pien d'amore*; it is erotic love which first afflicts the human soul with the pain of freedom, and it is the presence or absence of love which distinguishes the blessed from the damned. What can one thing have so many effects? It is Dante's distinction to have dramatized that question, and to have embellished his answer to it with an unusual repertoire of thought and emotion.

Dante's hidden master was Aristotle, who said that God moves the world on the beloved moves the lover. If Dante's vision has a single meaning, it is contained in that remark. Like Boethius, Dante distinguished the temporal and the eternal aspects of reality: one and the same thing can be seen both in time, and outside time; its aspect, but not its essence, changes with the point of view. Under the aspect of time, human freedom appears subject to Fortune. Under the aspect of eternity it is subject only to the will of God. Freedom, as the divine principle in man, constitutes our essence. But God moves by love, so the exercise of love is also free. Love does not feel free: in this world, at least, it appears always to afflict us seen from the proper metaphysical height. This compulsion reveals itself to be illusory. The illusion is born of the fact that, in love, a man chooses with his whole soul, and not with some appetitive part of it; therefore he cannot be himself. Love that is not perverted from its proper trajectory seeks the freedom of another, and this freedom lies in the personality, the quiddity, which makes the other who he is. Love which desires not the quiddity but the generality of the other is not love but lust; it expresses not the freedom but the enslavement of the subject, just as it seeks not the freedom but the enslavement of the beloved.

The mystery of love arises in the following way. The individual is unknown to himself, and the intellect (*intellectus est ineffabile*, says the scholastic tag); it is knowable, in time, only to the senses. Individuality is made present only in sensory form, and this is the choice of love only when it is understood. The

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first impulse of love is therefore sensual, and it has the human body—or more precisely, the human face—as its object. It is the smile of Beatrice that leads Dante on through Paradise, and which reveals to him the Love of which she is the refugence. So erotic love points towards God; but its sensual beginnings contain a temptation. (Without that temptation it could not be free, just as Adam could not have loved God freely had he no means to disobey.) If a man sinks, like Dante, into carnal desire, then his will is perverted from the object of love; he must then pass through the "refining fire" described in *Purgatorio* (and invoked in *Four Quartets*). When he reaches the reward and fulfillment of love, it is no longer an individual but a universal that he encounters. In this universal, the element of individuality remains: it remains in the smile of Beatrice, which is nobody's smile but hers, even when she is all but absorbed into the light of the Divinity.

One of the most striking of Dante's transformations of this doctrine lies in his political philosophy. Piccarda is one of those whose blessedness, being the fulfilment of an earthly will that wavered in its purpose, lies furthest from the fount of love. In a famous line she describes her contentment: *la sua voluntate è nostra pace*; "his will is our peace." There is a condensation in this line which illustrates the thoroughness with which Dante's thought impregnates his idiom. God wills our peace, and this is what pacifies and pleases us (a resonance lost by Cary with "his will is our tranquillity"). More than that. His will, as our peace, is not two things, but one. In obedience we find fulfillment, because obedience is the highest expression of our freedom and so brings us closest to God. To disobey is to will disharmony and to sever the soul from love. The punishments meted out in Hell are so described that it is the punishments themselves, and not the veil of earthly satisfaction which temporarily concealed them, which their victims are seen inwardly to have desired.

Dante's political vision follows immediately from the thought active in Piccarda's upthrust. The Church, as God's will in the world, calls to us freely to adopt its yoke and so recognize that its authority binds us not through tyranny but through love. The relation between the Church and its members must be like the bond of love, one of freedom. But this, too, is a freedom in which the whole soul is engaged. It must therefore be felt, in time, as a kind of intellectual truth. The Church, by imposing itself, force without negating the principle of its authority.

It is imperative to distinguish, then, the authority of the Church from the power of worldly princes. The power of a prince is good only to the extent that it freely aligns itself with the Church's spiritual authority: otherwise it is a perverted power and negates the freedom of its subjects. It follows that power and authority must be separable (so: as the better to combine); it also follows that power should lie with princes, while for the Church authority alone is enough. In making itself a Principdom, the Church of Rome offended against its mission. Harmony among princes will proceed not from ecclesiastical, but from secular power: hence the need for an Empire separate from the Church. From the height of this political vision Dante surveyed the world of his day and saw the same inadequacy in its political arrangements as he felt in his own personal life; in both was the same estrangement from the will of God.

For Dante, then, love is both the eternal origin and the historical essence of mankind. This is the universal meaning of the *Comedy*. Those who miss the meaning will be impressed not by the sublime vision of *Paradiso* but by those poignant episodes in the *Inferno*—Francesca da Rimini, Count Ugolino, Brunetto Latini—which represent to the Romantic mind the high points of Dante's achievement. There is in Sisson a total dedication to the original that forces his translation away from any romanticizing towards a modernity that is as classic as the representation of

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the underlying view: bleak because behind Sisson's admiration one feels the nagging presence of unbelief. It is a great achievement to have given Dante to the modern reader in such a way that the poem's significance is placed not in its beginning but in its end. Sisson redresses the balance against ages of misreading: but he redresses it with a vengeance, employing verse that is stark, cold, often deliberately uncompelling in its refusal of every rhetorical device. It is impossible not to admire the result, just as it is impossible not to wish that it were otherwise.

Dante's versification and his thought are inseparable: it is partly this that is meant by the "visionary" quality of the poem. The translator is faced with the task of holding verse-form and thought together so that the harmony between the sensuous movement of the one and the argument of the other is preserved. Without this harmony, or rather transparency, between thought and versification, the vision fades into darkness. Sisson's translation brings this problem into focus, as it brings into focus the whole significance of Dante for contemporary verse. There is no doubt that Sisson understands and deeply sympathizes with the doctrines of the *Paradiso*. He expresses them himself with the greatest clarity. Himself a constitutional theorist of some distinction and one of the most philosophical poets of our time, Sisson defers quickly to Dante's thought process, translating

it into loose rhythms responsive to abstract ideas. Hence the most beautiful moments occur not in the *Inferno*, but in the other two canticles. Here, for example, is the beginning of the great hymn to the Virgin with which the poem ends:

Virgin mother, daughter of your son,
Humble and exalted beyond any other creature
You are she who made human nature
So noble, that the maker of it
Did not seem to have himself made by it.

In your womb was fit again that love
By whose warmth, in the eternal peace,
This flower has germinated as it is.

There is a solemnity in these lines, and a respect for doctrine that is close to Dante. And wherever there is of clumsiness is explained by that. The phrase "the maker of it himself" is a scold to have himself made by it is an example. Awkward and unbending in English, it has its justification in its sense. There is no hope that our Anglo-Saxon grammar could encompass the syntactic condensation of *il suo fatto*, but she thought is the same—or almost so. "To have himself made by it" breathes the same open air as the original, "to make himself made by it," although more true to the sense. Sisson's compromise enables us to sense Dante's

meaning: which is that no agent but God was active in this mystery. Nothing in the sound, sense or rhythm of Dante's words deviates from the meaning, or from natural Italian, while each resonance carries the reader further into the heart of a mystery which no words can quite contain. It is impossible to reproach Sisson for having arrived only at the threshold where the meaning makes itself visible. Few translators even get so far. Kenneth Mackenzie's version provides an instructive contrast, employing as it does a syntactically variant of the blank verse made plausible by Cory:

O Virgin Mother, daughter of your Son,
Lowly and yet above all creatures raised,
Predisposed goal of the eternal plan,
You did ensue the human nature
That he who made it deigned to be its creature. It was in your womb
That Love
Was kindled once again, henceforth
This rose has opened in eternal peace.

At first sight this flows more naturally (although after a hundred lines the effect begins to pall). But the sense is lost. Leaving aside the gross overtones of "predisposed," as Sisson translates it, "fissio" in the original, and there is no doubt as to which of those English words captures the meaning, one has only to think of the overtones of "creature." For the speaker of modern English it is

impossible to use that word to convey the sense of single agency that Dante expressed. Moreover, it is not that God deigned: he did not disdain; and the rose, which is "opened" in Mackenzie, is germinated in Dante's peace.

Sisson writes with a pressure of theory at his elbow, and some of this he reveals directly in his somewhat muscular introduction. Dante was similar; his defence of vernacular poetry and his literary self-criticism show him as concerned as any modern poet to demonstrate his up-to-dateness. Through the defence of the colloquial idiom, and through Eliot's recognition of the significance of this defence, Dante has become for such poets as Sisson what Virgil was for Dante. He provides the model of a live poetic language.

But the achievement of the *dolce stil nuovo* is not only one of clarity: it lends dignity and profundity to the spoken tongue. And if the aim of this attempt is truth, the means is verification. It is through verification, alone, and not through fidelity, that Dante's vision can be recaptured, even if the first step in the attempt is to write like Sisson, in a language proper to one's place and time.

What then of rhyme? Sisson dismisses the possibility of imitating *terza rima* on the grounds that he never dreamt of using that verse-form in any language (poem of his own). "That," he adds,

may seem a poor reason, but it is in fact a good one, as anyone will understand who has understood that a translator must write as comes natural to him, in the language of his day and in the kind of verse which belongs to the current development of the language and of his own technique. The real task is to give the matter of Dante, as one speaks most effectively.

Sisson also thinks, with some reason, that the general differences between Italian and English make the imitation of *terza rima* rather like a clown following a ballet dancer. He cites Cary and Langford as proof that one can translate Dante without using rhyme at all. Nevertheless, he keeps the tercet structure. So he must face a question: how far can one move away from Dante's versification and yet preserve his sense?

If Sisson avoids rhyme it is not because it is unnatural to him. One of the longest of his own poems (*The Discernment*) is written in a rhyme scheme of *Hyacinth* complexity. Now can he have failed to notice the importance of rhyme in giving expression to the content of the *Divine Comedy*? If you look for the successful episodes in Cary's blank verse you will most likely pick out the vivid moments in the *Inferno*, and the beginning and end of *Paradiso*, where the imagery is so brilliant and frequently inaccessible. The essays range from the early Middle Ages to the poetry of Pope, and include materials on Medieval Latin, Old French, and Provençal literature as well as studies in Old and Middle English. Illus. cloth, £19.20, Limited Paperback Edition, £7.40.

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any hint of the urgency of Franco's memory, or of the utter finality of the words which Dante finds for it. The *terza rima* acts as a full stop to every line, squeezing the syntax that precedes it. There is infinitely more flow and simplicity in Cary (published 1914, begun 1880):

But at this point
Alone we fell. When of that smile
The wished smile, so rapturously
By one so deep in love, then he,
Front me shall separate, at once my
All trembling kiss'd. The book and
Were love's purveyors. In its leaves
That day

We read no more. . . . Such comparisons lend force to Sisson's contention that *terza rima* is likely to place more constraint on an English writer than his language will bear. They also give rise to an observation that will illustrate the finer shades of meaning that any reader, who wishes to be faithful to Dante's philosophy, must convey. In all these translations, even in Byron's, not otherwise notable for its fidelity, a conscious or unconscious respect is shown towards the philosophy of love. Francesco remembers reading of the smile of Guinevere, desire and kissed by Lancelot. By a fine transition, she then remembers the kissing, not of her smile, but of her mouth; she also remembers Paolo's tremble, and kisses her: "la bocca mi baciò tutto tremante". Much is implied in that transition. The smile of another is the picture of his soul, the announcement of freedom: it is the signal of the divine.

Animals do not smile: at best they grimace. As Milton puts it, "but smiles from reason flow, To brute denied, and are of love the food . . ." Francesco has been aware, through Guinevere, of her own smile, since she has been aware of the freedom of choice that is prompting her (erroneously) to receive the kiss, becomes a mouth, and the line trembles with the reminiscence of Paolo's passion, and the loss of her freedom. It is important that she attributes this trembling to Paolo, we feel too whole terrible force with which Francesco's self-image is overthrown. In a few natural words her desire and the philosophy which explains it, are jointly conveyed.

It is strange to find Sisson mistranslating: He, who will never be divided from me, and the two of us were trembling. One is inclined to respond impatiently to this, on the ground that Sisson is after all unconstrained by rhyme, and allows himself so much latitude with form that he should take some with content. It is also surprising that a translator, so steeped in the thought of the *Paradiso* should not have been concerned to capture all the minute ways in which the *Paradiso* is presaged in the verses of the earlier canticles. This is one statement, and in fairness it must be said that Sisson's few misrepresentations of the "matter" of Dante are mostly confined to the part—the *Inferno*—where his spirit is least willing to linger. But it leads us to an important question. Precisely what constraints of versification does Sisson, when he varies or underscores a meaning, obey? He would certainly say that if he has dropped the constraint of rhyme this is largely in order to respond effectively to constraints of another kind.

Now the best imitation of Dante's manner in modern English (the Brunetto Latini passage in "Little Gidding") also dispenses with rhyme, recreating the catenary effect by interwoven masculine and feminine endings:

By others, as I pray you to forgive
Both bad and good. Last season's
Fruit is eaten
And the fulfilled beast shall kick
The empty pail.
For last year's words belong to
last year's language
And next year's words await
another voice.

If the spirit of Dante is present in these lines it is for reasons other than the superficial resemblance to *terza rima*. The diction has what Eliot discerned in Dante but could not find in Milton: "the slight alteration which, while it leaves a plain statement a plain statement,

has always the maximal, never the minimal alteration of ordinary language." It seems to me that the discipline of Eliot's lines is the kind of discipline that Sisson is searching for: why else should he negate every movement towards iambic verse, while conserving the tercet structure of the original?

That Sisson has Elton very much in mind is shown in his own occasional reminiscence ("ch'non avrei mai creduto che morte tanta m'avrebbe disfatto") comes out as "so many that I should never have thought/Death had been able to undo so many", the repetition of "so many" coming, not from Dante, but from *The Waste Land*.

There is one element of discipline in the Eliot that comes directly from Dante: the use of an eleven-syllable line. Sisson rightly points out that Dante is fairly free with his measures, and feels justified in being free himself. (After all, he says, even Dorothy Sayers sometimes wrote in iambic pentameter. In fact at one point, *Inf. XVII. 121*, Miss Sayers manages seven, ten, and but his freedom is totally unlike Dante's (or Eliot's). It is not a matter of contracting or expanding a received unit of sound, but rather of letting a line complete its impetus according to its own internal movement:

And just as doves called home to their desire
With stretched, and steady wings,
Come through the air because they
want to do so;

So, separating from the flock where
Dido was,
They came towards us through the
malignant air,
So strong was the affection of
my cry.

This is Sisson at his best: clear, solemn, and with a firm grasp of English rhythm. (If one complains that the next ought to be "sweet—d'olce nido"—this is only because the translation has become so self-conscious that it is judged rather literally.) But the hendecasyllable movement is accidental; there is no sense of metrical constraint here, such as we find in Eliot.

One cannot help wondering why Sisson is so determined, therefore, to maintain the division into tercets, which follow the original more or less exactly (and which, as a tercet drops out one attributes this to oversight). In Eliot the tercets are held together by metre and assonance: at the same time the diction flows through and across them, giving the effect of "slightly altered" plain statement, with all the high morphological dignity that we find in Dante. This kind of ordered flexibility is difficult to maintain, as is apparent from Wallace Stevens's magnificent but repeated failures.

From this the poem springs: that we live in a place
That is not our own and, much more,
not ourselves
And hard it is in spite of blazoned
days.

Two perfectly Dantesque eleven-syllable lines, suddenly arrested by a characteristic, and somewhat, which falls of its own accord, and against the movement of the verse, into an iambic pentameter.

It would be unfair to criticize Sisson for not maintaining over many thousands lines the disciplines that Wallace Stevens can hardly sustain for three. But there is a further feature of Eliot's imitation which it could, would surely have overcome the seeming arbitrariness of many of Sisson's divisions. In every line of Eliot there is a breathing space, a slightly shifting caesura, just as there is in Dante. The caesura forces each line either to complete the movement of the one that precedes, or to begin the movement of the one that follows it.

Second, the conscious impotence/ of rage
At human folly, and the acceleration
Of laughter/at what ceases to amuse.
And last, the ending pain/of re-enactment
Of all that you have done, and been / (the shame that benefits from being examined in sequence). Close, well-informed and intelligent readings of individual poems support the argument, and there are more discursive treatments of these linking poems to the tradition, discussed by Keats and grouped under headings such as "Varieties of 'I'" in Wordsworth and Frost, "The Language of the Community" in Barnes, and "Interior Meditation" in Edward Thomas.

the opening canto, of the church of Rome:
Ed una lupa, che di tutte brame
Sembra una carca, nella sua magrezza

F. molto nante, fe'giva vier grame.
If you translate this literally, you get something like this:
And a she-wolf, who with every craving
Seemed to me over-burdened in her leanness
And many has she caused to live in sorrow.

All three features of the Dantesque line remain: the eleven-syllable movement, the feminine endings, and the slight caesura. Sisson deliberately avoids them. He also gives a new twist to the meaning: And a she-wolf, who seemed, in her thinness, to have nothing but excessive appetites. And she has already made many miserable.

After ten or so such tercets I begin to wish for some hesitancy in the verse, something that will stop each line from running itself out. It is that I have failed to catch some other, more subtle movement, in Sisson's verse, or on I right in thinking that the discipline of Dante can be recalled in more traditional ways? In any event I cannot escape the impression that for some reason, this translation is nearly, or at least, close to, and that the division into tercets produces a kind of arbitrariness precisely where Dante made his greatest bid for order. (The caesura is not more respected by Mackenzie, but the homogeneity of his rhythms and the faintness of which he transcribes the imagery are such that the translation can bear no comparison with Sisson's.)

In a recent poem in the TLS, Donald Davie (addressing Senatus Henney) wrote:
I think Sisson
Gut it, don't you? Plain Dante,
And if flat, flat. The abhorrent
Ask to be wholly plain.
Dante was never plain, although Sisson often is. Dante achieved harmony between what he thought and what he saw, and what he saw was a universe that no mere "plainness" can record. Davie is clearly a romantic: he reads the vision as a vision of Hell, reaching only by a stretch of the intellect towards the light. In Sisson, however, it is a Paradise that is clearly described, most personally. The verse, which lumps through the and plonkidos below, rises with the spirit of the poet. What seems like flatness is not really flatness at all, but a kind of persistent undercurrent of despair. Sisson cannot quite believe in Dante's vision. Therefore he removes from his versification every rhetorical gesture, everything that might imply a self-indulgent affluence of emotion. This is a kind of poetic defeat, to enact any metrical order. Sisson, like Eliot, has seen the significance of Dante for the poetry of unbelief. But instead of using Dante's versification to transcend despair, he reduces it to a wholly new kind of "plain statement". Thus his translation is the most sincere, the most modern, and yet in some ways the most distanced, from the original that I know.

The Poetry of Nature—Rural Perspectives in Poetry from Wordsworth to the Present (1980, University of Toronto Press, 0. 8020. 5494. 3), by W. J. Keith, a lecturer in English at the University of Toronto, is, as the author puts it in his preface, "a book about what happens when men and mountains (and other natural objects) meet, and the encounter is recorded in verse". This kind of simplicity and directness is characteristic of Keith's critical approach and style. There are chapters on Wordsworth, Clare, William Barnes, Hardy, Frost, and Edward Thomas, and a concluding one called "The Georgians and After", which takes into the account Edmund Blunden, Andrew Young and R. S. Thomas. That account "sees the poets and poetry" treated here as "ordained a lost but palpable world that benefits from being examined in sequence". Close, well-informed and intelligent readings of individual poems support the argument, and there are more discursive treatments of these linking poems to the tradition, discussed by Keats and grouped under headings such as "Varieties of 'I'" in Wordsworth and Frost, "The Language of the Community" in Barnes, and "Interior Meditation" in Edward Thomas.

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days.

Two perfectly Dantesque eleven-syllable lines, suddenly arrested by a characteristic, and somewhat, which falls of its own accord, and against the movement of the verse, into an iambic pentameter.

It would be unfair to criticize Sisson for not maintaining over many thousands lines the disciplines that Wallace Stevens can hardly sustain for three. But there is a further feature of Eliot's imitation which it could, would surely have overcome the seeming arbitrariness of many of Sisson's divisions. In every line of Eliot there is a breathing space, a slightly shifting caesura, just as there is in Dante. The caesura forces each line either to complete the movement of the one that precedes, or to begin the movement of the one that follows it.

Second, the conscious impotence/ of rage
At human folly, and the acceleration
Of laughter/at what ceases to amuse.
And last, the ending pain/of re-enactment
Of all that you have done, and been / (the shame that benefits from being examined in sequence). Close, well-informed and intelligent readings of individual poems support the argument, and there are more discursive treatments of these linking poems to the tradition, discussed by Keats and grouped under headings such as "Varieties of 'I'" in Wordsworth and Frost, "The Language of the Community" in Barnes, and "Interior Meditation" in Edward Thomas.

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arts. In any case, with the triumph of media like television and the newspaper, is a deploring of certain excesses and a calling for more public voice likely to regain audiences?

Audiences or not, a number of modern English poets and critics, haunted by the lateness of the day, have an acute, if not rigid, time-sense. The argument goes something like this: since in Shakespeare's time language was still in a fluid state, it was very well for him to exert his immense energy to carry on his experimentation. The language was there to be shaped. But the eighteenth century, discovering language's and poetry's laws, their true character, established them and their norms. The nineteenth century, often trying to escape the legality, was misled. A Hopkins, desiring to recover some of the fervor and linguistic excitement of a Shakespeare, therefore encouraging chaos, was woefully remiss. And increasingly remiss are those poets who would break out now. It is too late, bloodily or not. Perhaps, however, rather than regarding American poets as naive outlaws, English writers would do better to realize that, though the fathers of America were eighteenth century rationalists, the country itself began with Romanticism and, since it was new, with energy and a sense of pioneering freshness suggestive of the Elizabethan age. For unlike tightly knit, comparatively small England, long- and well-articulated in customs and practices, vastly open America is, at its best, open and pluralistic.

But Earlright's volume not only defends contemporary English poetry and the modernist aims of the Movement against charges such as provincialism, timidity, blindness, it is also polemical through its exclusions. The formula which he sets himself is "the poetry of civility, passion and order." One can appreciate this, but find it remote from the actualities of our time. And often, in this volume, poor little passion can be seen covering in the middle, brown, Kermodean, reverent study of the Movement, remiss. More's involvement in "last and division." He goes on, "I've suggested that the best work of our time, and a fiction, is aware of what it had to do up to be as it was. The worst work is that in which the need to seem philistine

has made the poet be philistine." These writers would appear to share or at least to be deeply affected by their world's most strenuous Porlockian prepossessions. How should poetry not suffer? And how can the tremendous fertility of recent American poetry be admitted?

Here is the principal rub and the problem of editing generally. I think of three remarkable volumes: *Yeats's The Oxford Book of Modern Verse 1892-1933*, Lowell's *Imitations*, and Larkin's *The Oxford Book of Twentieth Century English Verse*. The first two are fascinating productions of great, extravagant gifts. The Yeats by any decent standard was something of a fiasco, but at least it was a frolic, not, fraught in comments as the choices with the sort of high- and low-jinks only Yeats could serve up. Lowell's volume claimed to be freely translated versions of poets through the ages, from Homer on. Actually it was a travesty through Lowell's turn to parody a portrait of himself as a poet, a highly original lecture course on all poetry. Larkin also brought off an extraordinary feat. Though he did represent major poets like Yeats and Eliot, he managed by way of the twentieth century to paint a portrait of himself as a poet, a highly original lecture course on all poetry. Larkin also brought off an extraordinary feat. Though he did represent major poets like Yeats and Eliot, he managed by way of the twentieth century to paint a portrait of himself as a poet, a highly original lecture course on all poetry.

Perhaps this is the inevitable price we pay for editors who are also excellent, committed poets. By the weight, the conviction, and the limitations of their gifts they tend to look for the company of kindred spirits, seek themselves out in the poets around them. Obviously poets of the order of Larkin and Earlright should chiefly respond to their own world and the work that seems most compatible with it, especially when that world and work of all in a time of shrinkage, it is wasteful for these writers, and therefore for their country, to be not to encourage and benefit from the livelier, more products of English at large. Furthermore, what is the price in poetry when hard-headedness, skepticism and common sense, generating an abiding suspicion of elevation, are to mention the visionary, the intuitive, even the Mallarméan "something else"—dismisses it as mere inflation? Shall the man from Porlock take over all poetry?

The windowless belly

By Wendy Cope

VASKO POPE:
The Golden Apple
33pp. Anvil. £4.25.
85646 057 5

Who roils at the stars
Has his teeth full out.

There are several such solemn warnings in this "round of stories, songs, riddles and proverbs" from the Serbo-Croatian folk tradition. Anyone who has seen the recent *New Statesman* competitions for wise-sounding but pointless proverbs will find it difficult to remain straight-faced at some of the belly-belly examples of the genre. "The belly has no window, and when it does ever upon a tree trunk? might well have been prize-winning poetry. To others one responds with a nod rather than a smile. To a few, however, as in the case of a too cunning man jumps over his luck."

There is plenty of cunning in the stories. In one of them a Turkish sultan identifies true idols by setting fire to the mat they are sitting on and seeing whether they are so bothered to move—an idea that might have been among hard-liners in the Cabinet. In another, the devil's apprentice outsmarts him and eats him up while he is in the shape of a sparrow. Quite a few characters are eaten, or narrowly escape being cooked. The publishers hope that the book will appeal to children as well as adults, and there is certainly enough of the macabre to satisfy even the most bloodthirsty child. Some of the stories are enjoyable, others seem curiously incomplete.

will one reads the preface, where it is explained that Pope abbreviated most of them "to keep the most poetic part." Few children will thank him for that.

The riddles, of course, are the unquestionable, poetic kind and will disappoint the sort of person who likes to go round a ring how many elephants you can eat in a min. Printed underneath their answers, they look like the sort of notes, clever lines in search of a poem.

The translators, Andrew Harvey and Anne Pennington, found that the most difficult part of their task was to make the lyrical songs into "vivid and immediate English poems," they have, in several cases, succeeded. Some of the sadder ones, like "The Drowned Girl" and "The Shepherd," are moving, and there is an "amazing fable," "How Raké Came," which tells how, after God chased the first man from paradise, Man would have gone mad if it wasn't for the Devil. He built a building on four beams. Left gaps on all sides. Turned water into raki there. And sold it.

Vasko Pope's own poems owe a great deal to his involvement with his native folk tradition. *The Golden Apple* will be a welcome English admittance of his work. The book, for example, that his marvellously energetic sequence related to much older curses like "God make you black as a pot, thin as a thread—may you get the stem of a pipe and sit cross-legged in its bowl." The anthology, for all its laughable moments, provides a valuable insight into Pope's world, a world of games and magic, metamorphoses, and fairy-tale horrors, where pebbles, bones and disembodied heads can have an eventful life of their own.

Beasts of circumstance

By Jay Parini

RICHARD EBERHART:
Ways of Light
68pp. Oxford University Press.
\$11.95.
0 19 502737 X

At seventy-six Richard Eberhart stands apart, as ever, belonging to no school of poetry, being his own way without apology. An irrepressible voice in American poetry for more than five decades, in *Ways of Light* he remains ebullient, quirky, brilliant and unweary. Not counting his large Collected Poems of 1975, this is his first book of poems since *Pieces of Eight* (1972); readers familiar with his work will find Eberhart reworking his usual themes: the fragility of existence, the finality of death, mutability in its various aspects and guises. These are subjects which found their classic expression in his early work: "The Groundhog," "The Story of Aerial Bombardment," "For Lamb," and "Cancer Cells" come to mind, all widely anthologized. What is new in this book, or freshly seen, is the central but intractable issue of love; Eberhart asks with new urgency for gentleness to come, the "arms, caresses better than arms that fight." With a rapturous vigour reminiscent of Walt Whitman, Eberhart rejoices in his love, not only of humankind, but of the earth as well. "The wilderness of the garden," he writes, "And the apples, O the red apples of the orchard," he writes with poignancy, and with the peculiar angle of vision characteristic of his work.

Eberhart is perhaps the last genuinely Romantic poet not to suffer unduly from what Harold Bloom calls "helmetedness." He is unabashedly old, believing in "inspiration" as "innocently as any poet ever has." His work contains little of the ironic distance so common in American poetry in the past decades. This allows him to confront his subjects with an oddly affecting naivety; scarcely another living poet would write:

When darkness crept and grew
The hushed wide earth lay still.
I listened. I thought I knew
The vibration under the soil.
If I were now just dead
I could not make less sound.

I slowly bent my head
Inwardly to the ground.
I listened again. My feet
Took root within the soil;
Earth grew within me, sweet
In my limbs. I knew the soil
Had claimed my body whole.

The poet claims to have recovered that primal unity between man and nature which, in the great Romantic myth, existed before what Blake calls man's "fall into generation." By believing the myth himself, Eberhart makes us believe as well, at least for the duration of the poem. He achieves this by a rugged simplicity of diction and rhythm, by the old-fashioned lyricism of lines such as "When darkness crept and grew/The hushed wide earth lay still," this in spite of such very bad lines as "If I were now just dead/I could not make less sound." As with many good poets, one forgets the infelicities, one forgets almost to miss them; they are not there; in Eberhart's case, one would miss the unevenness, which reinforces the aura of spontaneity and childlike discovery.

The Romantic lyric, however modified, demands of its practitioners a certain concreteness. When the poet's eye strays too far from the image, the object under view, the vision of the poem will tend to blur. Eberhart knows this, but he has always had a hankering after abstractions.

The results can be unfortunate, as in the opening of "Angels and Man" (for instance, where he says, "What, for instance, is the impossibility of honesty within complexity." He begins "Interior Winter Sequence" with a flat statement that "All the deaths have love more valuable." Perceptive readers, however, will find that Eberhart's poetry, like that of most poets, including Eberhart, cannot be judged on its own terms. *Ways of Light* are those that grip the reader, allowing the poet's imagination to show what it holds, as in "Wet June."

Yellow dahilies, pressed down by
Approaching nightfall, the rain,
The hushed wide earth lay still.
I listened. I thought I knew
The vibration under the soil.
If I were now just dead
I could not make less sound.

The darkest secrets

By James Lasdun

JEREMY REED:
Bleeker Street
61pp. Macchetter: Carcanet New Press. £2.95.
85635 328 0

Walk on Through
Unnumbered pages. Spectacular
Disenchant.
0 9506316 1 2

There are certain artists who concern themselves obsessively with the areas of life that most people shy away from. Egon Schiele, with his portrait of himself masturbating, is an extreme case. Another example is Hart Crane, whose poems are full of oblique, but anguished references to his own tortured sexuality, and whose biography left one reviewer feeling "a dark secret I'd rather not possess." Jeremy Reed places himself firmly in this category by referring, through the title of his latest volume, *Bleeker Street*, to Hart Crane's poem "Poisoning piece about sexual dominance and submission."

Reed has an extraordinary gift for anatomizing experiences of acute emotional disorientation, and for portraying the utter bleakness of a certain kind of suffering. . . . men so isolately burnt by they whimper on grazed paws, and not the dying, but who stare back from death.

Reed's at Sherborne, and Kyd at Hridwell, subjected to pincers. Who thrashed on straw would deny a psychodynamic and tongueless, foam before inquirers?

Red light clarifies the gobble of mud in recess with the tide; and a dog howls from London's pantheon. Of Scab-bury.

In the introduction to his first volume, published eight years ago, when Reed was twenty-one, he wrote "My themes are two, the trauma of mental disintegration, inextricably woven with the regressive symbol of the ocean." Such announcements should not be taken too seriously, but it is nevertheless interesting to note that, while these themes continue to dominate his writing, the introduction to his second volume, *Bleeker Street*, shows a surprising departure: "the emergence of a personal value (notably the sea of a friend), an elegy in which

Likewise I am pressed down by
time towards the
Of life. I might as well be
vornal in the ground.
My silence is as deep as that of the
flowers.

Eberhart sounds this stringing, elegiac note throughout the volume. The mood of a New England autumn, with its traditional association of brilliance in decline, predominates, this "Season of bliss and yellow wistfulness." The corn going down with the sun late afternoon. The "Redolent of past dreams," containing recollections of William Carlos Williams at work on *Poems*, of Edith and Osbert Sitwell in a Boston restaurant, both "sharp and handsome" in a time when "some hard death had not taken over the world." There are also two elegies for Eberhart's famous aunt, Lucy Lowell, who died ignominiously in route from one love to another. However much Eberhart may resent defeat and the inevitable loss of his aunt, he finds a mild consolation in their shared knowledge, as in "Autumn," where in spite of everything, "The brute heat of circumstance blazes on."

It would be wrong to suggest that *Ways of Light* is a plodding book because of Eberhart's fascination with mutability and decline. The second elegy for Lowell, "Stone Words for Robert Lowell," ends with defiance as Goliath, in a central poem "Survivor," the poet celebrates the ancient ladies of the Maine coast who, in their immunities, can still "Drive from Boston to Maine," and who are clear in mind and body "sharp-tongued, sporting, very much alive." In a poem about an underground, Florida spring, he says: "It is the continuous welling up from the earth we must remember." Likewise, in "A Lull Call" he best respectfully to the eerie cry of the loon across tidal waters off the North Atlantic coast: "I have a the city I cannot understand," he says, accepting and celebrating its mystery itself.

To praise what remains mysterious, to fight back at death, at to acknowledge decay with a cold sorrow but no final bitterness to give both an emotional serenity and an intellectual uplift, Eberhart has come upon both honestly, and their mixture informs this late product of a life dedicated to the art of poetry.

Reed combines skilful portraiture with a profound sympathy for his subject. It is a long poem, and difficult to do justice to in a short extract, but these lines give some idea of the tone:

... those years
of illness when untimely deep
and diet a period of sun
your driving licence confiscated
houses burgled, and you without
an inventory as protection.
Your life had been a telephone
all of those superannuated
who move solitary
or starved you awake from sleep
and uncertainty of those hours
unaccounted for, rifled through
your pocket-book to elect
who would prove most sympathetic
in an old man's hypochondria.

For all his qualities, however, Jeremy Reed is a very unattractive character. The long excursus on the calendar in Chapter 10 is a case in point. And while the account of popular eschatology in Chapter 11 is fascinating, the discerning reader may wonder whether the demarcated arrangements for the Second Coming were really in the forefront of the mind of many Byzantines. Incidentally, the completion of the sixth millennium of the Byzantine era, when many expected the end of the world to occur, was in 492 not 508. The end of the seventh millennium in 1492, after Constantinople had fallen to the Turks, provided similar expectations. In fact the New World was discovered in that year.

Mango has much that is new and sometimes challenging to say on popular religion and cosmology on the nature and development of Byzantine feudalism and its often unnoticed Doppelgänger, the nascent Byzantine bourgeoisie, on the politics of Byzantine art—a particularly successful chapter—on Byzantine literature, and on many

The orderly Byzantine mind

By Robert Browning

CYRIL MANGO:
Byzantium
The Empire of New Rome
336pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
£17.50.
0 297 77747 5

For Voltaire Byzantine history was "a worthless collection of orations and miracles"; Gibbon saw it as "the epitome of barbarism and religion"; and Montesquieu "a tragic epilogue to the glory of Rome." Today we lack the arrogant self-assurance of the Age of Enlightenment and can look at the Byzantines with a new sense of empathy and understanding, even with respect. The general reader is well provided with introductions to Byzantine society and civilization by scholars of distinction. Apart from Norman Baynes's *Byzantine Empire* and Steven Runciman's *Byzantine Civilization*, now both somewhat dated, he has in English books by Joan Hussey, H. W. Haussig and Dimitri Obolensky as well as Runciman's recent *Byzantine Theocracy*, in French distinguished books by André Guillou, Hélène Ahrweiler and Alain Ducellier, and if he reads Russian, Alexander Kazhdan's remarkable *Vizantizskaya Kul'tura*. Byzantinists, it seems, are compulsive and effective popularizers.

Cyril Mango, who has over the years written on a variety of specialist topics from the *Homilies* of Ptolemy to the technicalities of Byzantine architecture, from the Hermitage of St Neophytus in Cyprus to the relationship between literature and society in Constantinople, now offers a new survey of Byzantine civilization. Like the other works mentioned, this is not a narrative history, but a series of essays, still turn to the austere George Ostrogorsky or the more discursive A. A. Vasiliev.

Mango's book is in three sections. The first, on Aspects of Byzantine Life, discusses peoples and languages, society and economy (the latter topic most briefly), the decline and revival of cities, dissenting groups in society, monks, and teachers. The second, on the Conceptual World of Byzantium, is concerned with popular ideas on the universe and its inhabitants, the Byzantines' view of their past and their future, and their ideal of the good life. The third, entitled "The Legacy," surveys the main features of Byzantine literature and art.

As Mango himself discerningly recognizes, this is a highly eclectic approach. Many topics are left out of account or merely mentioned in passing—military matters, foreign relations, trade, finance, philosophy and theological speculation, law, science and medicine, to name only a few. Soberly, however, the scarcity or obscurity of the evidence. But in the main what has shaped the book is the author's own judgment of what is important and what is not. The reader is never overwhelmed by a mass of indigestible information. Mango is always firmly in control of his own erudition, rigorous, sceptical, and detached.

One may occasionally take an eyebrow at what he seems to be important. The long excursus on the calendar in Chapter 10 is a case in point. And while the account of popular eschatology in Chapter 11 is fascinating, the discerning reader may wonder whether the demarcated arrangements for the Second Coming were really in the forefront of the mind of many Byzantines. Incidentally, the completion of the sixth millennium of the Byzantine era, when many expected the end of the world to occur, was in 492 not 508. The end of the seventh millennium in 1492, after Constantinople had fallen to the Turks, provided similar expectations. In fact the New World was discovered in that year.

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other topics. Yet the immediate impression is that the book is a curiously negative one, of a society irreparably divided between shrewd, ignorant and superstitious peasants and exquisite mandarins playing literary games in a language which none but they could understand, a society preoccupied with the end of the world, a society in which little or nothing actually happened. Careful rereading modifies first impressions, but a sense of vanity and emptiness remains.

Yet the Queen of Cities, whose fame spread from Iceland to Karakorum, the "golden bridge between east and west," as Marx called it, was lost on a byway of history. It played a leading role and often the dominant role in the affairs of Europe and the Near East for a millennium. As Norman Baynes remarked, an empire, to endure a century, must possess considerable powers of recuperation. The lack of a narrative framework makes Mango's picture of Byzantium too static. The changing responses to successive challenges are indeed sketched out; and the catastrophic break represented by the Arab conquests in the seventh century is emphasized. But in many chapters of the book the thousand years of the Byzantine empire are treated as homogeneous. The Byzantine mind, as Mango conceives of the world and of their own place in it was constantly

By J. H. D'Arms

RICHARD KRAUTHHEIMER:
Rome: Profile of a City, 312-1308
389pp. with 260 illustrations. Princeton University Press. £27.40 (Paperback, £9.20).
0 691 03947 X

To artists, Rome's past has always seemed both a glory and a burden. Where existing traditions are strong in architecture, city planning or the visual arts, fresh ideas make slow headway. Even when political or ideological conditions in Rome have been right for aesthetic change they have failed to produce it. Although Augustus Caesar had a firm hold on power for nearly two centuries, the great Roman architects of the talents of Eastern craftsmen, in his newly built forum the many Greek novelties take second place to the traditional Roman ways of organizing space, with the major temples raised high on the podium to emphasize both its frontality and the forum's central axis. New architectural forms solidly established elsewhere often had to wait generations before showing up, with a typically Roman time-lag. In the visual arts, the Renaissance palace of the Rucellai had been standing for several years when Rome was still struggling to get free of Gothic prototypes—witness Palazzo Venezia or Palazzo Capranica.

As in classical antiquity and in the Renaissance, so also, frequently in the Middle Ages, as Richard Krauthheimer's new book makes clear, Roman church planning of the twelfth century seems unexciting when viewed in the context of the medieval church as a whole. It is fascinating, the discerning reader may wonder whether the demarcated arrangements for the Second Coming were really in the forefront of the mind of many Byzantines. Incidentally, the completion of the sixth millennium of the Byzantine era, when many expected the end of the world to occur, was in 492 not 508. The end of the seventh millennium in 1492, after Constantinople had fallen to the Turks, provided similar expectations. In fact the New World was discovered in that year.

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changing. For instance, the Latin was used successively as a vernacular in the Christian Roman Empire, as a kind of poor relation, as an arrogant and aggressive upstart, as a hated and despised conqueror, and finally—by some Byzantines—as an ally and a possible saviour.

Mango is inclined to use evidence from one period for inferences about another. When he describes the Byzantine ideal of the good life he offers a mosaic of citations from the fourth-century Fathers, and particularly from the eminently quotable John Chrysostom. Does this really tell us much about how men saw the good life in the twelfth century, or the fourteenth? Mango clearly believes that it does. He rightly emphasizes the importance of the "order" in Byzantine thought and practice, with its implication that all change is bad. But there was another principle no less important, that of *oikonomia*, the recognition of the gulf between the ideal and the real, and the readiness to adapt to circumstances. Prescription of how people ought to behave is not good evidence for how they do behave, in Constantinople or in London.

There is, of course, a dearth of evidence on how people actually lived. But Mango makes things more difficult by discounting in advance the evidence of the twelfth century. In the great bulk of

resourceful combination of heterogeneous and often scrappy source material—dating great systems and positions of bridges, legal documents, plans and sections of buildings owned by Roman confraternities, later maps and *vedute*—is a tour de force. The many line-drawings and photographs, including maps drawn to the author's specifications, have been aptly chosen and, for the most part, well reproduced. Finally, more than forty pages of end-notes provide a mine of information both for specialists and for those who over the city's history, its monuments, including social and economic history.

The double-edged power of the past, to inspire but also to obstruct artistic creativity, is one of the author's major themes. At times the interplay of these forces profoundly affected the shape of the city. Under Constantine, Christianity—represented by scattered, unpretentious community houses and by the trophy of St Peter on the Vatican Hill—had as yet made no visible impact on Rome; visitors to the city saw the old Roman temples, the forum, the triumphal arches, the Caesars. Constantine, victorious under the sign of Christ, must have found this insupportable and was determined to leave his stamp on the city. Over the next two centuries, employing a building-type which was readily to hand, he introduced the basilica as the public architecture for Christianity.

But the weight of the past obstructed; Constantine reserved his boldest new ventures in church building for the Lateran cathedral and the basilica of St Peter's, for the periphery of the city where he owned property—outside the pomerium, the old legal pagan boundary and the preserve of the Roman aristocracy. When the reader reaches Krauthheimer's section on medieval urbanism, he will discover that by the eleventh century St Peter's and the Borgo had become an ever more powerful magnet, pulling the heavily populated sector of the medieval city towards the river, west towards and across the Tiber. In contrast, at the Lateran, the efforts of first-century planners to reach out to the city proved a failure, as is shown by the twelfth-century construction of a defence line around both palace and cathedral; the Lateran by then had effectively cut itself off from the heart of Rome.

Rome's tendency was to remain stubbornly conservative, her patrons and artists unresponsive to new concepts evolved elsewhere in Europe. Of special interest, then, are the exceptional moments when political constellations forced her to confront such alien concepts and a powerful, fresh and distinctly Roman art emerged. In the twelfth century, the conservative and pontiffs from Hadrian I to Leo

IV, backed by the administrative hierarchy of the Church and the aristocracy in the Roman milieu because they were able to use the past as a key to open up reality, rather than as a substitute for it; "antiquity became, under their hands, a vehicle for conquering the visual world."

The book has two sections: the first eight chapters, entitled "Image and Reality," and a further six about the changes in the medieval city. The advantage of this structure is that we meet individual monuments and the ideological factors which generated them before considering their position in the overall city plan. But the arrangement also makes for a certain amount of repetition, since a good deal of the evidence is pertinent to both sections, and the title of the first part sometimes seems forced. Yet, as the author himself repeatedly insists and convincingly demonstrates, the heritage of Rome's pagan and Christian past had an important bearing upon the way the city grew.

Krauthheimer's discussion of the Capitoline Hill is a case in point. Until the High Middle Ages, the hill remained at the edge of the ancient, unexcavated city. The street system, poised between its classical past (when its chief buildings were orientated eastwards towards the forum) and its Renaissance future (when Michelangelo unified the aqueduct into the trapezoidal area Capitoline approach monumentalized the western approach from town). These observations, culled from the second part of the book, need to be taken together with the earlier discussion of the construction of Palazzo del Senato and the motives which inspired it: the decline of papal power and of local family factions by the mid-thirteenth century, and the corresponding strengthening of the sovereignty of the commune, all symbolized by Brancaccio's appointment as solitary senator. It is inconvenient not to have the evidence for the palace as a reflection of the resurgence of Rome's civic pride joined more closely to the discussion of the Capitoline urbanism and topography.

All of which it perhaps only to say that this portrait of medieval Rome needs to be read in its entirety, and that its two sections are mutually reinforcing. One continually searches for, and almost never finds, a book of this kind: a comprehensive, personal and deeply sympathetic appraisal of a vast scholarly field by its most eminent specialist.

Byzantine literature," he writes, "Intellectuals constituted a very small clique and exerted no appreciable influence on the thinking of the public at large." "The provisions of Byzantine legislation were flouted more often than they were observed." All these statements are true up to a point of any medieval society. But they underestimate some of the specific features of the Byzantine world—the relatively wide spread of literacy, the social mobility which education conferred, the prestige of the learned language, which was after all only a different form of that in everyday use by the people. They run counter, too, to much of what he says himself about the importance of books in non-book circles, in particular the striking quotation on the importance of reading from a retired army officer who clearly had no sympathy with intellectual circles in the capital (page 239). Byzantine literature may be a distorting mirror, as Mango has called it elsewhere, but it does reflect Byzantine life and thought.

Mango mentions the frequent Byzantine distinction between the Christian and the classical heritage—"our world" and "the outside world." But he does not explore sufficiently the relation between the two worlds. The Byzantines, as we have seen, knew the world both by knowledge of the evidence and by acuity of critical judgment.

styles. Collectively, however, these artists represented something revolutionary in the Roman milieu because they were able to use the past as a key to open up reality, rather than as a substitute for it; "antiquity became, under their hands, a vehicle for conquering the visual world."

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The Mortal Danger

How Misconceptions about Russia Imperil the West

In this important new essay, Alexander Solzhenitsyn seeks to dispel a number of dangerous Western delusions about Soviet communism - that there is something essentially Russian about communism, that there are 'moderates' in the Politburo, that the continuing pursuit of 'detente' is consistent with such acts of aggression as the occupation of Afghanistan.

WILLY DE ROOS

North-West Passage

In 1077 Willy de Roos set out from Folmuth in his thirteen-metre steel ketch *Willow* to attempt to conquer the North-West Passage and sail through the ice-blocked waters of Arctic Canada from Greenland to the Bering Straits, a goal that has lured explorers since the 18th century. Only in 1906 was the feat finally achieved by Roald Amundsen in his 50-ton cutter *Gjøa*. Willy de Roos's description of how he avoided disaster and how *Willow* became the smallest boat since *Gjøa* ever to complete the passage make this one of the most fascinating narratives of true adventure ever written.

FICTION

JONAH JONES

A Tree

May Fall

This eloquent first novel is set in England and Ireland during 1916. It is both a tender and moving love story as well as being a novel about war, military psychology and the tenability of pacifism.

SUZANNE GOODWIN

The Winter Sisters

The Winter Sisters is the second of Suzanne Goodwin's novels about the Victorian theatre. Stella Gibbons wrote of its predecessor *The Winter Spring* in *Books & Bookmen*: 'one of the few novels I have read in which the "period" is not laid on with a large butter knife... this is artistry'.

BODLEY HEAD

commentary

Anna 1 and 2

By Francis Wyndham

Garbo
National Film Theatre

Greta Garbo was seventy-five on September 18: in celebration, the National Film Theatre has been showing throughout this month a selection of her films (all, that is, but the best). In a season full of fascinating discoveries, perhaps the most curious was *Love*, an adaptation of Anna Karenina in contemporary (ie, 1927) dress which, unlike Garbo's talking version eight years later, is very rarely revived. The latter was ruthlessly grandly scripted by Clemence Dane, Sam Vinter and S. N. Behrman; this silent scenario is the work of Frances Marion. The credit should be emphasized, as it is often easy to assume that Garbo, somehow or other, has written her own films; and it remains a possibility that the actress, rather than Miss Marion, is responsible for the particular interpretation given here to the bare bones of Tolstoy's plot.

Anna, married to a repellent tyrant who refuses to sleep with her, has directed all her powerful erotic feeling on to her son Serezhka. The scenes between Garbo (aged twenty-two) and Philippe de Lacy (who looks about twelve) are remarkably uninhibited in their physical expression; even more so than those between Garbo and John Gilbert, who plays Vronsky. (This is surprising as the two adult stars, married to be lovers off-screen, had just created a sensation with their passionate playing in *Flash and the Devil*, and the title of their second vehicle was alleged to justify the billing 'Garbo and Gilbert in Love'). In one scene, Anna and Vronsky are interrupted by Serezhka's appearance behind a closed French window: mother and son kiss yearningly through the glass. In another, while she watches her son take a bath, Anna seems unable to keep her hands off his naked body. When Anna runs away with Vronsky, it is his jealousy of her incestuous attachment to ship: little is made of their relationship to back with his regiment, silent nothing of her possessiveness, in which Garbo's finest effect, in abundance, shows the lovers dallying by an Italian stream when a crocodile of schoolchildren passes. Garbo holds of one little boy and starts to paw him; clearly taking her for a child-molester, he bursts into tears and runs away. Shucked into sobriety, Vronsky agrees to let her see her son again.

The film was made with two alternative endings: a sad one to be shown in Europe and New York, and a happy one for the reassurance of less sophisticated audiences in the rest of America. The first can roughly be said to follow Tolstoy, though with considerable distortions, leaving decided to sacrifice Anna persuades him to attend a regimental dinner, where he and his commanding officer jointly drink 'to love'. She is next glimpsed on the railway platform, and her suicide follows with such startling swiftness that an effect of anticlimax is produced. The novel's famous (and potentially cinematic) sequence of her drive to the station is omitted. During this, Anna's stream-of-consciousness monologue contains the following reflections: 'Well, supposing I picture to myself what I want in order to be happy? Well, I get divorced and Alexey Alexandrovich gives me Serezhka, I marry Vronsky! ... What then?'

This reflection seems to have assisted the second ending, in which Anna simply vanishes after the ironic toast 'to love'. Three years later, on manoeuvres with his regiment, Vronsky comes across an item in a newspaper: Serezhka Kurenia, a pupil at the St Petersburg Academy has won a prize for horsemanship. Vronsky obtains leave of absence, hustles to the school and asks to see the boy—who does not recognize him. Gilbert nonetheless embraces, with an elusiveness only slightly less restrained than Garbo's. 'Do you have news of your mother?' he asks. 'Yes,' says the child, 'she has visited me every day since father died.' At that moment, the headmaster enters in Anna—who, but for the fact that Vronsky has at last been disappointed from the father's cures, Garbo rewards Gilbert with a kiss—and the film fades out on a classic cliché as narrative as it is as a ending. Nonetheless, it is the more intriguing of the two: since the original had shown her left so far behind, a veiled, dizzy deviation is almost inevitable. (It is curious that every great literary tragedy contains a final within it the clue to a possible happy solution.) One leaves the theatre pondering over the question posed by Tolstoy's Anna: 'What? What, indeed?' Frances Marion's Anna has resolved the husband-versus-lover dilemma—but not yet that of lover versus son.

Constructions of character

By Richard Combs

My American Uncle
Academy Two Cinema

My American Uncle is a puzzle. Of any other Romaine film this would be an uncomplicated, obvious statement. His characters and plots—emotional as in *Hiroshima Mon Amour* or architectural as in *Last Year at Marienbad*—seem to lie together in some aesthetic relationship. The bright, almost polished surfaces of his films are usually crowded with activity, but one has to follow the editing pattern rather than the action in order to understand what is going on. His is a supremely constructed cinema, where significance and meaning lie in the cut from one shot to the next and not in the subtleties of the performances. Similarly, psychological significance has to be read across, on the surface, like looking for faces hidden in the pattern.

His new film contains a quite satisfying puzzle of this kind. It begins and ends with a collage of multiple picture postcard scenes from the lives of its three main characters. In between, their

education and growth are briefly sketched in, the waxing and waning of their emotional histories, the rise and fall of their careers (even those paralleled with the activities of their respective movie idols), all according to a pattern which is an accompanying commentary links to a theory of the biological basis of behaviour. The sting in the tail of the theory—its deterministic and contentious point—is that what we think of as individual personality is simply a grab-bag of value judgments which are all the result of our social programming, and that as we get older these tenets of 'personality' become more rigid, less susceptible to argument.

Take away one such brick, the commentator announces as we last fragile reconstruction of the characters we have got to know over the past two hours—and the whole edifice will collapse. What Romaine has given us, in effect, is a scientific theory of personality that is akin to and building characters: an artificial process of montage, collage and assemblage. Nothing is organic, essential or individual; everything is association. In the words of Prozac, Henri Laborit, the film's off-screen voice of scientific authority, 'We are the others'.

On this level, *My American*

Uncle is a well-modulated, elegant, often rather witty structure. What it does not suggest (as does the mystery surrounding the hero of Romaine's *Starzky*, or the multiple deities of *Providence*) is that the pattern encloses something that is not part of the pattern, that Romaine's scientific fiction is likely to discover anything that is not already part of its scientific method. The flatness of effect that has always seemed his most interesting trademark, the insistence that his inner meaning of his films lies on their surface, here looks like the result of the crippling necessity of following three stories in loose synchronisation.

René Ragueneau (Gérard Depardieu) is the son of a struggling farmer who breaks with his father to become the technical director of a textile factory. Jean Le Gall (Roger Pierre), the son of an upper-middle-class family in Brittany, desires to pursue literary and political ambitions in Paris; and Janine Garnier (Nicole Garcia) nurtures her working-class Communist hopes, wanting to go on the stage. Having made this successful departure, all three have career problems in competition with others: Janine's illness, breakdown and attempted suicide. So far so good in the film, but the area of the film is non-Laborit must, in its very worst theory. The difficulty for

the film and its secondary public in co-opting Laborit's deterministic, mechanistic system for its structure, is how to prevent itself from coming to similar conclusions.

To begin with, as the film's student authority, Laborit is introduced in a quietly disconcerting way, wandering through his laboratory, looking paternally over the shoulder of a young female assistant as if he were the host of a *Look At Life* programme. He himself declares that Laborit is not the sum of the film: 'The fiction doesn't illustrate the biological thesis, and the thesis doesn't necessarily comment on the action. Sometimes the two lines cross, but just as often they run parallel or even move away from one another.' Despite his comments on the 'associative cortex', man's highest brain function, Laborit fails to account for the random play of creativity and imagination within the mystery element of the film. His construction may have to do precisely with the imaginative life of his characters: they all have secret ambitions which remain unfulfilled and the role-playing more complex than it might appear. But the film's *My American Uncle* finally seems less than Romaine's best work. It is less than Romaine's best work, it is less than the area of the film is non-Laborit must, in its very worst theory. The difficulty for



This cartoon by Major of Garbo is taken from Alexander Walker's richly illustrated Garbo (1919). Woodfield and Nicolson. £10.00 (77794 8).

Learning not to spit

By Patrick O'Connor

Elizabeth Schwarzkopf
Wigmore Hall

Elizabeth Schwarzkopf gave her farewell London recital at the Wigmore Hall exactly two years ago, so it is appropriate that she should have returned recently to the same platform in her new role as teacher to give a series of master classes with prominent young professional singers.

As her students sing the whistlers' encouragement, conducts a bit, scoldens them to let more than a couple of phrases be sung without making a point. Not surprisingly, the lengthiest discussions and most illuminating comments come during performances of music by Mozart.

Schubert and Wolf composed Schwarzkopf is particularly associated with. But expertise here made her stuffy. Of a rare Schubert piece she says 'This is a musical act, you know I don't think they all have to be musical. It is amusing to hear a singer land for her dedication to the text at the time out to give a little discourse on the potential ugliness of the German language and the danger of "spitting consonants all over the drawing room".'

The pianist at the Wigmore Hall was Kathryn Sturrock, obliged to step out and pick up the thread of the evening occasionally subdued by a command such as 'Just play less notes—they build up'. It is not fair to review performances by the singers who were, after all, being put through some fairly gruelling exercises. But clearly the future holds much promise for a good number of them.

commentary

Dramas of desire

By Frances Spalding

Stanley Spencer
Royal Academy

Stanley Spencer's distrust of foregrounds plunges one immediately into the midst of his dramas. At the Royal Academy one is hurled into the crowd accompanying Christ through Cookham streets, into the midst of resurrections and regiments, down disappearing roads and across towns of suburban gardens. Precipitated one moment into domestic scenes, the next into ones of harsh industrial labour, the visitor to this inspiring and enormous retrospective emerges having shared in Spencer's varied engagement with life. For he observed everything with the same unwavering stare that he found in the last late self-portrait. After the rush-hour frenzy of his self-figure compositions, this full-face portrait is still, direct and demanding.

Spencer is acclaimed as a great English eccentric; yet no artist offends more seriously against our native tastes. Instead of intimacy and restraint, he portrays vivid emotions in an extrovert manner: for an audience that dislikes sexual frankness in the visual arts, he produced nudes that shock with their stretched skin and minute detail. Between the wars, while easel painting flourished, Spencer conceived of murals and vast projects to be housed in public buildings. While many artists tinkered with landscapes and domestic still-lives, Spencer painted communities and major biblical subjects. Like G. F. Watts, his small stature did not prevent him from dreaming on heroic scale. He continues a narrative tradition that stems from Italy in scenes that are unmistakably English.

The exhibition begins with Spencer at the Slade School, imitating Pre-Raphaelite illustra-

tions in drawings that strain with ideas and unusual imagery. Taught by Tunks to express the roundness of form, Spencer soon learnt to distort enough to convey his feeling for the shape described. Even before he arrived at the Slade, he had sensed his own interests and needed only to learn the means to give them expression. Almost certainly he attended Roger Fry's lectures on monumental painting, in which relief was upheld over chiaroscuro. Turning to Spencer's earliest figure subjects, one finds he employs short-hand methods of description, sketching in the outline of eye or arm and using the minimum of modelling and finish. The openness of his touch contrasts noticeably with the arid filling-in of pattern and colour found in much of the later figurative work.

At the start, Spencer's inventive technique is married to a highly original sense of the poetic. Cubism is used to create a mood of reverence in 'John Donne arriving in Heaven', while Mosaic stands behind the solemnity of the small 'Visitation'. For a period, Spencer's vision was perfectly in harmony with his circumstances. His reports to his mother, because of earthly paradise, and he envisaged the biblical stories that were so much part of his childhood taking place in his streets. Heaven was everywhere, and everywhere present. This mystical mood gives to his early paintings a marvellous buoyancy: figures pop up out of windows and graves, or lean as if blown by the wind which becomes a metaphor for the spirit.

Literature on Spencer makes frequent reference to his loss of vision. Spencer himself put about conflicting reports to what caused and when it happened, but it is generally related to his growing obsession with sex following the failure of his two marriages, with Hilda Cayline, and Patricia Pease. Because of the slightly odd chronology of this story, the exhibition cannot see the wonder in the follow. But a very noticeable change

in style can be observed between the gallery devoted to the Burghclere Church decorations, some of which have been removed from their location for this exhibition, and those paintings which immediately follow.

At Burghclere Spencer transferred his religious sense from Conkham to the mental tasks he had undertaken in the First World War, first as a hospital orderly, then at a training camp and finally at the Front in Macedonia. Inspired by St Augustine's *Confessions*, he learned to perceive the spiritual in everyday acts such as bed-making and the buttering of bread. He records these scenes, enlarging observed fact through expressive distortion. But in the gallery which follows, the routine is exchanged for the bizarre. A man and his wife make love to sunflowers. Elsewhere, five young women fall into an ecstasy of sexual longing at the sight of old men, huddled nervously into a protective group. Further on one can compare the famous 'Resurrection', Cookham (1924-26) with the same subject produced in Port Glasgow in 1947-50. Though similar ideas appear in each, such as the dusting down of resurrected husbands by their wives, in the later composition the distortion is exaggerated and the narrative is the riot of pattern making the composition crowded and airless, the colours reduced to an even greyness of tone.

Just as we begin to tire of the Bank Holiday mood, of Spencer's ceaseless pursuit of 'happiness and Love' ('If that is Resurrection', expostulated Churchill, 'then give me eternal sleep'), our attention is relieved by the stretch of Spencer's sympathy as it takes in the unexpected and idiosyncratic: the carpenter assessing the straightness of his saw, the soldier plunging his head into a basin of water, the ship-builder splicing a steel jawer or dropping red-hot rivets into position. The viewer cannot see the wonder in the barest reality', Spencer de-

There are no problems in directing our sympathies. In the first act it is established that every character except one (the one who will be killed), is civilized, witty, charming and convivial, the obstacle to perfect domestic happiness being the war in Europe. This is done without making everyone invidious, and even the comic seriousness of the Miller children is not sentimental.

Fanny is played by Peggy Ashcroft, with visible enjoyment and energy, even though the character is something of a comedy stereotype. A woman who has to be at the centre of everything, she is witty and cultured, devoted to her dead husband, harsh to her son, shrill with the servants and determined to cause everybody a great deal of trouble when she decides to die. David (John Quayle) engages in spirited repartee with his mother, sarcastic but essentially well-meaning. Even the German family, whose experiences might excite a few signs of strain, are good-natured. Susan Engel and David Burke, as Sara and Kurt, give quiet, strong performances; Sara is tough, loyal and affectionate, Kurt kind, civilized and tolerant, and their children, devoted to them, are intelligent and responsible. 'Are those your children?' exclaims Fanny, 'or are they dressed-up midgets?' The necessary fly in the ointment is a Romanion couple also staying in the house, with his American wife Martha (Dorothy Grant) who, in love with David, Count de Brancovici (Sandro Elia) is a different sort of exile from Europe: a self-seeker and cad, he is plainly asking for somebody to bump him off.

Though the count provides the immediate source of the drama by threatening to reveal Kurt's presence to the authorities, more important is the conflict between the two worlds, Europe and America, which the characters represent. Lillian Hellman had been reading *The Europeans*. Their efforts to understand and reconcile them-

'Grandma has not seen much of the world' are what we are there for, and we are firmly associated with the Americans. Initially, it is the Germans who are disadvantaged by being out of context, and their incongruity is conceived, principally, as comedy. But their incompatibility becomes more serious until, at the climax, fundamental differences break through and destroy the Germans' efforts to conform with their surroundings. What makes the on-stage murder so important is a dramatic moment in that it reverses the positions: Kurt's European context asserts itself, making Fanny and David (and the audience) outsiders.

This production not only feels right, it looks right. Eileen Duggan's set and the costumes by Jessica Gwynne are excellent—for example, on the first entrance of the Miller family, contrasting the grand opulence of the colonial-style interior with the thick, clotted and heavy shoes of the refugees. It also sounds right, with all but the German accents dependable. The whole production works towards the success of one moment which, melodramatic though it is, is one of the best in Lillian Hellman's drama.

By Alan Jenkins

Company
Cottesloe Theatre

Crucial to Samuel Beckett's writing life—apart from the reality of life itself, the most pressing there is—has been the discovery of the voice, the freeing of that voice and its burden of private anguish; which has much more to do with the weight of its words and their hold over us than nations such as solipsism or 'inadequacy' of language. There is something perversely inevitable about this dramatic reading of his latest non-dramatic work *Company*, giving an embodiment on stage of a voice which 'comes to one' in the dark. John Russell Brown has directed what is nevertheless a sensitive and persuasive performance which returns to the Cottesloe in the New Year.

Stephen Moore, as the voice spinning its tale of isolation, is one with you in the dark. Its defences of endless grammatical permutation and incessantly patient

qualifications gradually wearing thinner and more desperate, manages to vary the pitch and rhythm to suggest a 'frightening drive' to self-preservation even at the onset of panic, and an infinite capacity for feeling pain. Nicky Atkinson shows an impressive depth and delicacy of emotion (within his own husky range of inflections); his voice alternately maniacs and caresses in its 'telling of a past', a litany of unbearable memories. The actors being actors try to do, and succeed in doing, too much. But it is saying a great deal of the reading that one might have felt during it both the astonishing centrality and the oddly marginal, vulnerable quirkiness of Beckett's utterance, never more charged than in simple, but strangely, 'fohllis', 'moultas', 'father'—as well as sentences such as these: 'You feel on your face the fringe of her long black hair stirring in the still air. Within the tent of his face your face is hidden from her. She murmurs, "Listen to the leaves. Eyes in each other's eyes you listen to the leaves. In their trembling shade."

Stephen Moore, as the voice spinning its tale of isolation, is one with you in the dark. Its defences of endless grammatical permutation and incessantly patient

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Fodder for the farms

By Gillian Wagner

JOY PARR:

Labouring Children
British Immigrant Apprentices to
Canada 1869-1924
181pp. Croom Helm. £11.95.
0 85664 398 1

PHYLLIS HARRISON (Editor):

The Home Children
271pp. Watson and Dwyer. Win-
nipeg, Canada. \$14.95.
0 920486 02 9

The titles of these two books, *Labouring Children* and *The Home Children*, succinctly describe the origins of the children and their destiny. Both are written by Canadians and they throw light on the forgotten saga of the 100,000 child migrants who left Britain accompanied by friends or relatives to work on Canadian farms between the years 1869-1924. The children came from the overcrowded towns of Britain, with many charitable children's homes then catering to the needs of the second half of the nineteenth century. Most were under fourteen, some as young as three or four; they were sent across the Atlantic to be boarded out until they could be apprenticed as agricultural labourers or domestic servants in rural Canada.

Whether the reasons put forward in support of the emigration of juveniles were religious and philanthropic, in the which case emigration would remove the children once and for all from the evils of city life, or the more grandiose aspirations of empire builders, the underlying cause was economic: Canadian farmers needed cheap labour and Britain had not yet come to terms with one of the results of her industrial revolution: the enormous problem of child destitution in her great cities.

In reply to the unasked question, Maria Rye, who took the first party of children across the Atlantic in 1869 wrote to *The Times*:

"What treatment will they receive during the cold, the starvation, the temptation they meet with in our gutters, what duties will they receive from our hands when they reach the goal, the hospital, the Magdalen receive them? Can anything I introduce them to in Canada and America be worse than what I leave them where they are now?"

William Taylor, Director of the National Museum of Man, discussed himself the son of a "Home Child" in the preface to *Home Children* that the epic of these children has been almost totally ignored until now. He writes that some of their personal stories collected together in the book "almost incredible" in the "defenceless children who were despised and exploited in Canada's mean colonial world where anti-English prejudice flourished."

Joy Parr's excellent and admirably concise book, *Labouring Children*, is the first serious attempt to study the history of the juvenile emigration movement, to analyse the motives of those who placed the children in Canada and consider the reasons that brought the movement to an end. The book is based on numerous original sources and contains a wealth of new material. As Joy Parr says, the movement seemed out of step with its time: it is strange to find a policy flourishing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century which took young, to leave some for full employment in the United Kingdom, and place them on farms in Canada where their educational opportunities were limited and the work heavy. More especially so as many of the philanthropists engaged in the work saw themselves as following in the steps of John Shaftesbury, whose own scheme, put forward in 1849 to Parliament, for removing his ragged school children to South Australia, expressly stated that the children should be over fourteen years of age.

Professor Parr discusses the ambivalent attitude of the over-enthusiastic philanthropists who, while stressing the importance of family

life and the sanctity of the home, ruthlessly parted children from kin and kin when they considered such separation to be in the child's best interests. Philanthropic, abduction was a term used by Dr Barnardo to explain his sometimes high-handed actions in removing children from the care of their parents or relatives whom he considered their physical or moral welfare to be at risk. More than 6 per cent of the boys and 8 per cent of the girls were shipped to Canada illegally without their parents' consent. In reply to criticism the philanthropists could point to their record books and the case after case where children had been found wandering in the streets, abandoned by their parents, forced to beg and steal to live at all.

But behind the façade of disinterested philanthropy other motives can be discerned. As the century wore on, fear of the dangerous classes provided another powerful argument for the continuation of the policy of emigration. Unemployment in Britain combined with the demand for cheap wage labour in Canada made it economically advantageous for the Dominion Government to provide subsidized travel to encourage child migration. Once in Canada the children could be either apprenticed or adopted, but as one girl put it, "Doption, sir, is when folks gets a girl to work

without wages!" There were, however, some cases where adoption really did give a child that elusive ideal—fresh start in life. But in the main the children were boarded out until they were old enough to be indentured as apprentices and become wage earners. Although they were supposed to be treated as members of the household this seldom happened in practice.

The transition from institutional to domestic life taxed to the limit even the most stolid rescue home child's ability to endure through disruption. Many wrote later fondly of their time in British Homes... by contrast their years in Canada were filled with uncertainty and isolation. The two worlds were so different that their time (in the Homes) inevitably left children unprepared for their Canadian roles, dashed their spirits and made them disappointed. The Canadian masters and mistresses.

As they grew to adulthood few of the children became farmers: farm wives as had been fondly hoped. Instead they entered factory jobs and service employment in the Canadian towns and cities. Many migrated to the United States and many returned home. By the 1920s many returned about the fate of those children were being openly expressed and in the spring of 1924 a

delegation, headed by Margaret Bondfield, was appointed to investigate the system. As a result it was decided that no child under fourteen was to be accompanied by parents who would be admitted to Canada.

Joy Parr's meticulously researched and richly documented account of this extraordinary story is essential reading for all who are interested in the history of Anglo-Canadian relations and the welfare of the children of the working class, who, ground down by economic difficulties, often agreed to part with their children in the last desperate hope that it would be for the best.

These children were, and still are, a major factor in the Canadian story; their descendants, now scattered throughout North America, are estimated to number over a million. Phyllis Harrison's book, *The Home Children*, tells the story of the children in their own words and gives us a glimpse of the other side of the story. The letters were the result of an appeal made in the Canadian press for information from Canadians or Americans who had come to the country as juvenile emigrants. They have been admirably put together by Phyllis Harrison with only minor editorial changes.

The letters have a directness and strength about them which is perhaps the most striking feature. I found them moving, sometimes disquieting. Arthur Dure was sent to live with a distant family when he was 11. The phenomenal nature of his existence is starkly underlined in the letter from Falk, the son of a family wrote:

"But he didn't stay long, until he was fifteen years old then he went to America. Now he is all forgotten. I left behind a Bible, but I never saw it. I put a piece in a home, first served—Bible—ever called."

After that I wrote a letter to the home calling for some name of this to write to me in a name of friendship, because I was my friend, there was no answer—no trace of him at all. I have a picture of him yet."

A small picture of Arthur Dure on the same page as the letter reinforces the point. The book is admirably produced and well illustrated with photographs from the Public Archives of Canada and as from the archives of many of the voluntary organizations which sent children to Canada.

Where to begin his choice? My own starts with Gavin Douglas's *Aeneid*, completed in 1513. If it seems tendentious to open *The Oxford Book of Verse in English Translation* with a Scot, I can only reply that it was Douglas's work which first established on this island the level at which great poetry can be translated. And why not Chaucer? If Chaucer were "great translator," he translated mostly by incorporating and transforming other men's work in poems that are ultimately great originals. One could, of course, assemble fragments from here and there, including an early example of Petrarch in his *Song of Troilus*, but the results would be scrappy. Perhaps only once do we find a stretch of translation as neatly acceptable as his free version in *The Legend of Good Women* of this passage from Virgil's *Aeneid*, where Aeneas and Achates meet with Venus:

So longe he walketh in this wilderness,
Till at the laste he mette an humerose,
A bowe in hande and arrowes hadde
Hire clothes cutted were unto the knee.
But she was yit the fayrest creature
That ever was yformed by Nature;
And Eneas and Achates she grette,
And thus she to hem spak, when she hem mette;

"Sew ye, quod she, 'as ye han walked wyde,
Any of my suetyn walkes you beynde
With any wyde bowe or any best'
That they han hunted to, in this forest,
Yukked up, with arrowes in hire cas?
'Nay, sothly, lady,' quod this Eneas:
'But by thy beaute, as it thyneketh
Thow myghtest nevere erthly woman be,
But Phebus syster art thou, as I gesse.
And, if so be that thou be a goddess,
Have mercy on our labour and woe,
I nam no goddess, sothly; quod she tho;
For maydens walken in this contree here,
With arrowes and with bowe, in this manere.
This is the reyne of Libie, there of which that Dido lady is and queen...
'My mastir Chaucer,' writes Gavin Douglas, who knew this passage, as can be seen by comparing it with his own translation of the same incident (No. 7), where, once more, Venus opens a poem, in spite of Robert Frost's dictum, "Poetry is what gets lost in translation."

I admire the way George Steiner, in the introduction to *The Penguin Book of Modern Verse Translation*, finds a reply to that depressing, even self-outrighting idea of Frost. As Steiner says, "Arguments against verse translation are arguments against 'all translation' since 'There can be no exhaustive transfer from language A to lan-

guage B, no meshing of nets so precise that there is identity of conceptual content, union of undertone, absolute symmetry of aural and visual association. This is true," Steiner concludes, "of a simple prose statement and of poetry."

Side by side with Frost's dictum, two other theses have persisted to admonish the translator of poetry. Both of them seem to be products of the academic milieu, distrustful still of the way the non-expert usually meaning the poet—might set to work as translator. The first of these theses states that the only true translation would be a kind of mirror image of the original, and therefore it is either best not to try, or best to leave it to the experts in the field of French, Russian or whatever. The second thesis is that putting poetry into a fresh language must be to endow a fresh nature, as far as possible, with one more possession of beauty. To which Paster-nak adds that a translation should "stand on a level with the original and itself be unregretted as the original."

The high degree of technical knowledge and experience in the work at each House, which public servants must acquire to explain why there are no new laws in a field where the financial interests are anyway very large. Members of Parliament have always been impatient about the cost of "listening to trifling legislation" and have intermittently sought to cheapen and improve the presentation of private business legislation. There was indeed a major revision of the Private Business Standing Orders in 1945, but the author gives credit for these reforms to the only laborator between the Society of Parliamentary Agents and the officers of the two Houses, introduced by Orle Williams, rather than to Members themselves.

Parliamentary agents have also developed a complex relationship with central and local government bodies, especially in connection with hybrid bills, in which public law is intermingled with private law. The author implies upon particular points of interest. To all this the book serves as an accurate introduction.

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The poet as translator

By Charles Tomlinson

"How my cup o'erlooks her brim" reinforces the result: "The laughing Nectar overtook the Lid." Here Dryden appears to have advanced beyond the modesty of Fanshawe's "A Translation at the best is but a mock Rainbow in the clouds" imitating a true one towards Cowley's, "I am not so enamoured of the Name Translator, as not to wish to be something better, though it want yet a Name".

Indeed, throughout the Augustan era, a philosophy of translation prevailed that permitted a wide freedom in abstracting from one's original and drew attention to its general nature rather than its local details, so that Stephen Barrett, whose *Ovid's Epistles* appeared in 1750, could write, "If you take care to make sure of the true outlines, and strong likeness of your picture; and of no great consequence, whether exactly copied or not."

In the present anthology, I have excluded large-scale works of imitation like Johnson's *Vanity of Human Wishes* and Pope's *Imitations of Horace*—works that bear out Johnson's own definition of imitation, "A method of translating looser than paraphrase, in which modern examples are imitated, and are used for ancient, domestic for foreign". At the same time I have, from early on, included poems—Wyatt and Surrey are cases in point—where a foreign original is imitated in terms of poetic form, and in which the poet has made his own into the language by the tension. However freely our older authors appropriated their originals, I can, at this point in history, see good reason for having at least a working definition of the word "translation". This is what Donald Davie calls for in a highly argued paper for the Open University, "Poetry in Translation".

He comes up with the formula: "Translation is something which takes over the thrust of its source in more or less responsible fashion, the 'trick' but denies itself the liberties of the imitation and of other relations more tenuous still". Davie is arguing against George Steiner's willingness to "consider as translation" any poem which makes a sustained allusion to a previous poem.

One sees the good sense in Davie's desire for clarity here and one admires the conduct of his argument. Among his examples of poetic translations appear two versions of part of Baudelaire's "Le Poète" by Lowell and one by himself. The Lowell contains some very free and sometimes very odd inventions (from "when Racine's tirades scoured our greasy Seine" to "greening horses' teeth") and is, in its own way, a work of adaptation. Davie's own version is more literal, but where Baudelaire has the swan stretching its head towards the ironic sky "Comme s'il adressait des reproches à Dieu", Davie writes "as if to sue (its neck all twisted) God for damages". Is not this phrase surely more adapted to the purely and full relation to the original? And so one is back with the perhaps insoluble question of what degree of adaptation is necessary or desirable in a creative translation.

One thing is certain—translation of poetry is essentially a compromise between the original text and the present interests and capacities of a given writer. Dryden says that the writer must be a poet. There is a difficulty here, in that some translators have shown no particular capacity as poets outside their translations, and others, like Gavin Douglas or Golding, are famous for a single extended work of translation—Douglas for his Virgil and Golding for his Ovid. Certainly our great poets have often been great translators, but perhaps the safest minimum prescription is that the translator of poetry must be a poet so long as he is engaged in that act and art.

In speaking of translation as a compromise between his original and the interests and capacities of a writer, I trust the word "compromise" carries over no sense of timidity. Dryden's interests and capacities were those of a man in "his great, clatterer" who had written the masterpieces of his age. One of his modern admirers, the poet Charles Sisson, introducing his own translations, draws from

Dryden's example what he calls "an ineluctable law": namely, "the verse translation has to be done in the only verse that the translator, at the time of writing, can make; and that if he could not make verse before he will not suddenly become so gifted because he is faced with a classical text."

How elementary and yet how salutary such a reminder is when one thinks of the enormous number of translations from classical texts, ranging from the marbled to the mushy, in which Greece and Rome were industriously buried by earnest Tyrticlav, in which we both collaborated, he speaks of the flight or track a poem makes through the mind. "Every real poem," he says, "starts from a given ground and carries the reader to an unforeseen vantage point, whence he views differently the landscape over which he has passed. What the translator must do is to recognize these two terminal points, and to connect them by a coherent flight. This will not be exactly the flight of the original, but no essential reach of the journey will have been left out." So, in the end, for any live translator, it is not a question of approaching a text with a defined method, but of eliciting definition from, and restoring to clarity that chaos which occurs, as line by line,

Dryden long ago took on this argument when he wrote: "... a good poet is no more like himself in a dull translation than his carcass would be to his living body". And Dryden, being a poet and a person, not a mirror, admits with candour of his own translations—some of the greatest in the language—"I have added and omitted, and even sometimes very boldly made such expostions of my authors, as no Dutch commentator will forgive me."

Dryden early in his career had entered into a debate on translation begun by the Royalist group of poets—Denham, Cowley, Fanshawe, Sherburne and Stanley—who had been in French exile after the defeat of Charles I and shared particular and daily reason to think in terms of translation. Sir John Denham, in congratulating Fanshawe on his version of Guarini's *Il Pastor Fido*, contrasted his achievement with the pedantry of those who stuck too closely to the original text: "That servile path thou nobly dost decline". Of tracing word by word, and line by line: "A new and nobler way thou dost pursue. To make translations and translators They but preserve the ashes, thou the flame." True to his sense, but truer to his fame.

Dryden had been at pains to draw out some distinctions from Denham's poem and also from the preface to his version of Virgil's second *Aeneid*, in which he had written: "Poetry is of so subtle a spirit, that, in pouring out of one language into another, it will all evaporate, and, if a new spirit be not added in the translation, there will remain nothing but a caput mortuum." Dryden joined with Denham in refusing to trace "word by word, and line by line"—metaphrase, as he calls this. He distrusts imitation, or adaptation as we should say, and chooses "paraphrase, or translation with latitude, where the author is kept in view by the translator, so as never to be lost, but his words are not so strictly followed as his sense; and that too is admitted to be simplified, but not altered". Once one has put things like this, it is, as Dryden was to find, difficult in practice to limit the element of adaptation: "I have both added and omitted," as he later confesses. Thus in his translation of Boccaccio's *Cymon and Iphigenia* appears the splendid expostulation about the Milie of Rhodes ("Mounts without hands, maintained at vast expense, in peace a charge, in war a weak defence"): Vulcan in *The Illiad* Book I becomes "the rude Skinker" (a phrase purloined from a marginal gloss of Chapman's); memories of Macbeth are called on to describe the feast of the gods ("But Mirth is merr'd, and the good Cheer is lost"); Vulcan pours and Crashaw's twenty-third psalm

life and amid contingencies. She is even frank enough to say: "I am not sure... how far a discussion of methods of translation attracts much useful reflection. Poems are not translated consistently. Every line proposes a new set of possibilities." What Mrs Feinstein aimed at, while facing this challenge, was, she says, "to be sure the total movement had been sustained". In similar vein, Henry Gifford has said that translation is resurrection, but not of the body. Introducing those versions from the nineteenth-century Russian, Fyodor Tyutchev, in which we both collaborated, he speaks of the flight or track a poem makes through the mind. "Every real poem," he says, "starts from a given ground and carries the reader to an unforeseen vantage point, whence he views differently the landscape over which he has passed. What the translator must do is to recognize these two terminal points, and to connect them by a coherent flight. This will not be exactly the flight of the original, but no essential reach of the journey will have been left out." So, in the end, for any live translator, it is not a question of approaching a text with a defined method, but of eliciting definition from, and restoring to clarity that chaos which occurs, as line by line,

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It is the sense of inner pressure that makes vivid those versions of Marina Tsvetayeva done by another British contemporary, Elaine Feinstein—translations that embody for us the tortured years of pre- and post-revolutionary Russia, and the way they were suffered by a very un-English sensibility but a sensibility that has, at last, found for itself a style in English. Like Sisson, Mrs Feinstein knows there is no ideal mode of translation and that it is undertaken in the course of a

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the sounds and patterns of the original crumble to pieces in the mind of the translator. Dave catches the challenge of that disconcerting moment brilliantly when, in his *The Poet of Chicago*, he writes of the professional poet as a translator realizing that in translating rhymed verse the rhyme is the first thing to go, and metre the second: whereas the amateur, wretched creature that he is, cannot be sure of having poetry, the professional has these external features of it". Predictably, Mrs Feinstein's versions when they first appeared were criticized for their neglect of Tsvetayeva's stanza scheme and for neglecting what cannot be convincingly reproduced in English: the Feinstein versions went immediately to the head of what can—that jagged, breathless, ear-wearing tone of Tsvetayeva's poems.

Clearly there was common ground,
a common sense of impending inner
chaos perhaps, that drew Elsie
Fainstein to Tsvetayeva. This per-
sonal aspect is a paramount one.
Verse translation is not just a job
to be got through. In the best trans-
lation there is an area of agreement
between translator and poet, a
something they have spiritually
sympathy. The Earl of Roscommon
in that very sensible poem, *An
Essay on Translated Verse*, of 1684,
puts it like this:

Examine how your Humour is
inclind,
And which the Ruling Passion of
your mind;
Then seek a Poet who your kind
band,
And Chuse an Author as you chuse
a friend;
United by this Sympathetic bond,
You grow Familiar, Intimate and
Fond;
Your thoughts, your Words, your
Stiles, your Souls are one;
No longer his Interpreter, but He.
Pound himself possessed this kind
of ability. I am thinking of his
versions of Li Po—Li Po seen as the
outsider like himself — where he
enters into the skin of his original
through one of those combinations
of the fortuitous and the creative
that make art possible. In Pound's
case the fortuitous aspect, the his-
toric chance that deepened his view

The poet as character

By P. N. Furbank

WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD:
Lives of the Modern Poets
 316pp. Faber. £8.50.
 0 571 11618 3

It is an unfair reviewer's trick to spend all his time arguing with a book's professed intentions, or its title, as opposed to what it does. William H. Pritchard does rather invite this treatment, though, by being so explicit about his aims, and so insistent on his title. No words are left of his aims. He intends to "provide discussions, and evaluations of, the nine most interesting and important poets writing in English in the first part of this century," and he is concerned with the interests of a supposed reader who would like to ease with a complicated literature, or so with poetry perhaps; but who in any case is curious about, if relatively unfamiliar with, at least some of the figures treated here.

The last line reads: "Yeats, Edw. Arlington Robinson, Frost, Pound, Eliot, Stevens, Hart Crane, and William Carlos Williams."

It is, as a reasonable man, and he has achieved it with much ability, sensitivity and intelligence. There is cunning and tact in the construction of these nine chapters. The selectiveness of emphasis, and slight variations in doing several different things, are making a detailed point, suggesting a generalization, and getting you to think through history and chronology, through time and space, and clearly, like years of study in a lecture room and seminar. It is, of course, by now a traditional method of thought and analysis. Pritchard practices it in (as you say) (as you say) Edith Wharton's practices it similarly. Mixed mode practices are similarly inherited from illustrious critics, and at a time when novelists are deciding what the more methodologically "right" is more

creativity may also be in the fact of the First World War. Pound admired the implicitness of Chinese poetry—"a simple eloquence underlying" "The Jewel's Silence", for example—and those poems of mingling and frontier service which make up *Cathay* clearly had their implicit link for him with the present campaigns in France. "*Cathay*", in Hugh Kenner's words, "is largely a war-book, using Fenollosa's notes such as Pope used Horace or Johnson juvenally, to supply a system of parallels and a structure of allusion . . . the *Cathay* poems paraphrase, as it were, an elegiac war poetry nobody wrote". This confrontation, deepened by history between the personal and a text in a language distant in time and place, was of a kind that had happened to one of Pound's acknowledged forebears, Gavin Douglas, but under conditions of a Scotland in turmoil. Douglas had brought imaginative resources to that sense of instability and threat to civilized values that gives us undertow to Virgil's cadences. Again, it is a story of the man and the moment—a time of imminent chaos in the day of insecurities culminating in the Battle of Flodden in 1513 and the destruction of Scotland's youth. It was in that very year that Douglas completed his *Aeneid*, a Douglas strain of disasters involved not only the spirit of that undertaking but its ultimate exile and death.

The success of translation depends then, on a writer's confrontation with his given moment. It depends also on his capacity and readiness to undertake it and, thus, in some sense, a self-interested undertaking. In the doing of it, each writer is thrown up against a new set of things, adding to his awareness of literature in literary expression, an awareness that carries over to his reader. This was what happened in the august cases from Wyatt to Ezra Pound, in their opening *Poésie with Poésie*,¹ one hears English being drawn into a dialogue with Chinese cultures, as Julian Jaynes has shown in his *Twentieth Century Poets*, in the Chinese Book of Rites, as we use in magnificent professional rhythms something English and something irreducibly foreign and

Know then :
Toward summer when the sun
is in Hyades
Sovran is Lord of the Fire
to this month are birds
with bliter smell and with the odour
of burning
To the hearth god, lungs of the
victim
The green frog lifts up his
voice
and the white latex is in
flower
In red car with jewels incarnadine
to welcome the summer

Thus, in all the great examples of
how to do it, the matter is two-way
—the poet-translator is extending
his own voice, is sometimes writing
his finest work, and is performing
a transmission of civilization in the
process of extending his own voice.

Wyatt found his personal voice to
some extent through Seneca,
Petrarch, and the Psalms, Marlowe
seems to have learned that Donne
thought through, through Ovid, the
Gongs and Sonnets. Where Wyatt
was thought once to be most bluntly
English, as in "Madame without
many words", it now turns out he
was translating from the Italian of
Petrarch to Donatello. And all the
time English was gaining by these
interchanges.

Think how Ben Jonson brings
over the very beatitudes of Latin
when he refreshes Calpurnius:
"Come, my Celia, let us prove"
While we can, can the sports of love",
where the famous *Nox est perpetua*
una dormienda gets translated as:
"As long as we lose this light
Tis with us" perpetual night.
And here the loss of *una dormienda* is
made up for, by the success sug-
gestiveness of the couplet and its
brisk conclusive rhyming. Without
these examples of intermarriage,
English poetry would be the poorer
for the loss of *una dormienda*.
Dryden talks about *una dormienda*
the nimbleness of a greyhound and
English the bulk and body of a mas-
tiff. And, very differently from
Jonson, he sets precisely that bulk
in the body at the service of Latin
when he translates Juvenal's
Sixth Satire:
In Saturn's Roign, at Nature's Early
Birth,
There was that Thing call'd Chastity

Those first unpolished on Earth . . .
Gave Suck to Infants Matrons, Big
Rough as their Savage and Bold,
And Fat with Acorns of Gyganctick
 Mold;
 Lords who
 Rang'd the Wood,
 Belcht their
 windy Food.

In all these examples the first thing one sees is the way that, having rejected the use of their originals, these translators do not stop at a merely literal rendering of the unmated words. Octavio Paz clinches our point about their opening of Poesie in an essay about translation where he says: "... a literary translation in Spanish we call, significantly, *transliteración*, meaning that literal translation is not possible, only that it is not translation. It is a device, generally composed of a string of words, to aid us in reading the text in its original language. It is somewhat closer to a citation than to translation, which is always a literary operation." Our examples have used a linguistic system as strongly organized as that of their originals, different as it must be in terms of music and metre, but comparable in terms of literary vitality—and, in Poesie's words, "unrepeatable". They have done it now in the phrase Ezra Pound's fond of. And to any discussion of translation Pound must sooner or later be admitted. He is significant in the way he has extended the resources of English in his handling of Chinese. For instance, and he is significant also for his very active awareness of the creative problem—the transformation of the literal into the literary.

In an early essay, "I gather the limbs of Osiris," Pound speaks about the way words transmit an electricity among themselves, generate and intergenerate certain qualities and combinations of energy by their very positions in a work. "Three or four words," he says "in exact juxtaposition are capable of radiating this energy at a very high potentiality. . . . [The] peculiar energy which this [words]' is the power of tradition, of centuries of race consciousness, of agreement, of association. . . ."

What Pound's essay implies for a translator of poetry is that he must find a way of so placing his substituted words that the electric current flows and that there is no current wasted. If you fall *here*, on the level of the electric interchange of the words, you fall badly and this is the most common failure in translated poetry, even though you are howlers like "le peuple *amou* *reux* dit" Englished as "the purple *am* *laid* another egg".

Pound was thinking particularly about the translation of Chinese poetry at that time. Now in H. A. Giles's *A History of Chinese Literature* of 1901, a book current, that is, during Pound's formative years, the reader was asked to believe that the great poet, Wang Wei, wrote the following:

Dismounted, o'er wine
 Then I whisper, "Dear friend,
 'Alas," he replied,
 "I am sick of life's tale,
 And I long for repose
 On the slumbering hills
 But oh seek not to pierce the hills
 where my footsteps may stray;
 The white cloud will soothe me
 for ever and ay."
 "Funnily enough, sinologists
 now have complained less about the
 kind of thing that our Pinyin
 subsequent remarkable
 translations. Indeed, Arthur Waley
 praises Giles for writing "rhythmic
 and literariness with wonderful de-
 tail." His version has been
 thought original.

called "accurate." Half the trouble in this Wang Wei piece, as the absurd tripping metre, in the analysis the whole thing is a fallacy of ear, "the ear," as Charles Olson says in his essay, *Projective Verse*, "which is so close to an understanding that it is the mind's, that it is the mind's speech." For the poet's speech, surely, is what the poet catches in his quest *linguando*, however much he may sacrifice the original metre and stanza order of the poem according to the degree of his success in this attempt will be how many carry the conviction of "an speaking to men".

MEDIEVAL HISTORY

Feudalism and Friedmanism

By J. R. Maddicott

J. L. BOLTON :
The Medieval English Economy
1150-1500
400pp. Dent. £10.95 (paperback,
£6.95).
0 460 10274 5

Twenty years ago the course of the medieval English economy seemed to have been successfully charted. Its fortunes were thought to have been largely shaped by the rise and fall of population, for upon this depended the demand for land, corn and manufactured goods and the social relationships between landlord and tenant, capital and labour, and wage and status. The key to these questions thus lay with demography, and its exponents traced a steady growth in population, accelerating towards the end of the twelfth century and continuing until the years around 1300, when hunger, pestilence and famine were pressing upon a land-starved peasantry, brought high mortalities in their wake. On this reading the Black Death of 1348-50 did no more than give additional impetus to a population decline which had begun generations earlier and which would last until the late fifteenth century.

Much of this argument is now in dispute. If the general sequence of demographic fluctuations remains established, its timing, causes and consequences are open to question. Partly responsible for the contention is a fundamental attack from the left which has elevated class relations over population as the primary determinant of economic change. Although the Marxist case for this view has been made, the evidence convinces it has done good service in pointing, for example, to the way in which wage levels were set not only by the market but by the market power of the working class. The Marxist case, but two by regionalism, and part two, the dissolution of the old orthodoxies, represents the mere advance of historical knowledge. As

had seemingly remained high enough to maintain demand for land and grain and, with it, the prosperity of the great. It follows from this that the famines of the early fourteenth century cannot have been severe enough to depress the population for very long; and this is indeed what Bolton argues.

Yet common sense alone suggests that we should be wary of seeking a turning-point in the millennium years of the 1370s, rather than in 1314-17 or 1348-50, which we know to have been times of economic crisis. As in the years around 1200, so in the quarter century after the Black Death, high prices are no necessary indication of high output: mint output soared in the 1330s and 60s, fell sharply in the 1370s; the £12,000 worth of silver coin which left the London mint in 1353 was the largest quantity produced in any single year during the later Middle Ages. The great landlords this was arguably the last time of estate and spurious prosperity during which the effects of a decline in demand were temporarily staved off by inflation of the currency. That most revealing of social documents, the sumptuary statute of 1363, strengthening the case for maintaining the Black Death as a historical role, for it suggests that the standard of nobility was already under threat from those lesser men who now had the means to ape the dress

Stasis by the
By D. J. A. Matthew
BARBARA ENGLISH :
The Lords of Holderness 1086-1260
A Study in Feudal Society
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and manners of their superiors. Bolton rightly notes that on many manors vacant holdings were filled rapidly after the plague, implying that there was no immediate fall in the demand for land. But this merely highlights one further problem presented by our evidence: it comes almost exclusively from the great estates, whose lords and the aristocracy and powers of compulsion which may have temporarily enabled them to defeat the forces of the market. Smaller lords, whose fortunes are more obscure, are likely to have been less well placed to resist. Implicit in Bolton's arguments, here and elsewhere, is the assumption that the great estate typified rural conditions. Since it was on these estates that lords were best able to maintain household and labour services and to impose a regime of the estate, the argument may distort our view of relations between lords and tenants, usually seen to have been characterized by relentless pressure from above and ineffective resistance from below. But on the great estate, where lord and tenants were neighbours, hostility may have been less marked. The early commutation of services there, and the apparent difficulty found by gentry in raising rents fixed by custom, suggest a less badly ordered peasantry and perhaps a more cordial relationship between masters and men. Difficult

Stasis by the Humber

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exactly fit her evidence; as a result, she creates an impression of Holderness as a provincial back-water with oddities of his own.

In her first chapter she provides an account of the public life of the lords of Holderness up to 1260. The lordship was held by three men of different families before the counts of Aumale established their hold over it in 1160. Henry I, King of Count William, whose tenure stretched from at least 1130 to 1179, is the first lord whose activities in Holderness can be described. He was a powerful lord, and his influence for drawing up in the middle the feudal organization and it is unlikely that his immediate successors, his daughter's three busy husbands (1179-1212), maintained the same degree of supervision. On the other hand her son and grandson is possible that the counts resumed personal interest in the lordship. In spite of her own accounts of these lords, the author is not sure of the subsequent chapter that the history of the lordship indicates the smooth working of an administrative machine for 150 years and a stable society in Holderness, even at the highest social level.

This view sounds somewhat improbable and cannot be supported from the evidence available. It is fostered by, if not derived from, the own structuralist manner of treating the problem, adopted on doubtless decided grounds. It is so thin, if, however, no clear distinction can be seen between the county and estate officials before 1260 it is unlikely that the count's administration of justice is as is presented here. It is also unsatisfactory that no attempt is made to place the Holderness lordship in the context of the count's general administrative activities in the other lands in Lincolnshire, though Dr. English, says that it was characteristic of later holdings of the count. He also says that they are on both sides of the Humber. It is at such times that the inherent difficulties in treating Holderness in terms of lordship become apparent. The county, feudal society was not a mere prey to a society.

Dr English's faith in the static society revealed by structuralist analysis seems to cause most trouble in her chapter on feudal tenures. In view of the troubled early history of the lordship, and the lack of any survey of fees before 1260, it is hardly surprising that the Roundian model of knight service is helpful, but she does not question its validity. She appears to assume that large fees of forty-eight carucates occurred early. The survey of 1260 certainly shows that about seven of the ten fees were then of forty-eight carucates, though there was one fee of fifty-two carucates and two of twenty-two. She established on twenty-three fiefholders. Dr English does not discuss these anomalies. Though there is a

charter of 1188 that refers to an eight-carucate fee at Tharleshorpe, in the county of Lincoln, of 1195, in which the fee of 48 carucates is first mentioned, as "proof" that the large fee had by then become generalized. She does not even discuss the strangest feature of the charter, namely that the countess conferred the fee of 48 carucates on twelve acres for the service of one sixth of fee, namely of eight carucates (? equals 960 acres) ! She does not explain this apparently inequitable burden. What is the answer appears to be a tax assessment rather than a military service and it may be that the forty-eight carucates' fee likewise developed in connection with taxation. It could be linked to the low twelfth-century assessment of the north of the fief, where six acres paid the equivalent of one hide elsewhere, as noted by Farrer. On the other hand, it could be a means, potentially, to improve tax yields if taxes based on military tenures like the *carucate* were actually levied according to the *carucates*.

This question needs probing more deeply. Likewise, the strange case of the Poitevin scutage of 1214. Halderness had its own peculiarities by the thirteenth century. Dr English's view that feudal tenures depended on the Conqueror's imposition of *servitium debitum* means, however, that she uses the thirteenth-

century evidence mainly for anti-
quarian purposes.

The general interest of the matters she investigates makes it a cause for regret that Dr English has been content to study one locality in the light of too many 'revelations' and to make no attempt to winnow her subjects back to life on their own terms. There is nothing here to cast new light on English history in general. Typical is her review of the William of Wykestepeyrie. She does not assess his suitability as earl for York (he normally calls him Earl of *Yorkshire*), and on the whole presents him as a somewhat over-the-hill, middle-aged, overbearing, and over-weighed man, who could no longer ride his horse, it is commendable that he was still campaigning at the age of about sixty, and that he was, however, seen in his behaviour generally, as one of many of his contemporaries "which is a strange way to approach the man who must have been the dominant factor in the Humble lordship in Middlebury."

There is in the end a notable lack of warmth in her treatment of the great Yorkshire lords, whereas in the last chapter on land and people the book comes more alive. Here, with much less need to take national "models" into account, Dr English lets the documents speak for themselves.

Vintage ascetic

By Judith McClure

CHRISTOPHER DONALDSON:
Martin of Tours
Parish Priest, Mystic and Exorcist
171pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul.
£8.95.
0 7100 0422 2

Christopher Donaldson's book approaches the life of Martin, the late fourth-century ascetic bishop of Tours, with great piety and enthusiasm. It is a work of devotion, and the author, for thirty years the vicar of St Martin's Church at Canterbury, a late Roman foundation, and he has visited many of the places associated with Martin directly or by subsequent dedication. He is enthusiastic, because although he has no professional historical training, his knowledge of the life of Martin and his personal experience has given him insights into Martin's attitudes and behaviour which might be denied to the professional historian. He is also a devotee; he is devoted, too, to the study of the historical sources of Martin's life, and by the spirituality of the fourth century, which he regards as the 'vintage years of the Christian era', with a powerful motivation for his own church.

Mr Donaldson's sincerity cannot abate, his, however, from his self-appointed task of writing an analysis of Marlin's life, teachings and influence set within a clear and accurate historical context. Here, unfortunately, his lack of scholarship and expertise reveal themselves. He has relied on dated and schematic material for his history, society and religion of the Late Roman Empire, and thus his views on the world in which Marlin lived, especially his account of fourth-century Gaul, are frequently unreliable. More than that, he does not provide an accurate narrative of historical events.

In the case of Marlin himself, the author has read the immediately relevant sources in translation, and he has relied, wisely, on Jacques Fontaine's heavily annotated edition of Marlin's letters. His criticisms of Severus, but the conclusions he has drawn from his reading are rendered invalid by his ignorance of much of the history of Christianity and in particular the development of asceticism in the fourth century. The history of Western Christianity there has been much recent work.

It is a pity that Mr Donaldson's obvious devotion to his subject was not buttressed by wider knowledge of it. Even in his own terms, today's Christians cannot hope to learn much of the past without not accurately distorted and unreliable

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